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BINDLOSS

THE FRONTIERSMAN



HAROLD BINDLOSS

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# THE FRONTIERSMAN

***BY THE SAME AUTHOR***

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THE FRONTIERSMAN  
MYSTERY REEF  
THE LONE HAND  
THE DARK ROAD  
THE GHOST OF HEMLOCK CANYON  
THE BROKEN TRAIL  
PINE CREEK RANCH  
PRAIRIE GOLD  
CROSS TRAILS  
CARSON OF RED RIVER  
GREEN TIMBER  
THE WILDERNESS PATROL  
THE BUSH-RANCHER  
NORTHWEST!  
THE MAN FROM THE WILDS  
THE BUCCANEER FARMER  
FOR JACINTA  
KIT MUSGRAVE'S LUCK  
LISTER'S GREAT ADVENTURE  
THE LURE OF THE NORTH  
THE WILDERNESS MINE  
WYNDHAM'S PAL  
HARDING OF ALLENWOOD  
ALTON OF SOMASCO  
THE GREATER POWER  
THRICE ARMED  
THURSTON OF ORCHARD VALLEY  
THE CATTLE BARON'S DAUGHTER  
THE DUST OF CONFLICT

*The*  
**FRONTIERSMAN**

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BY  
HAROLD BINDLOSS



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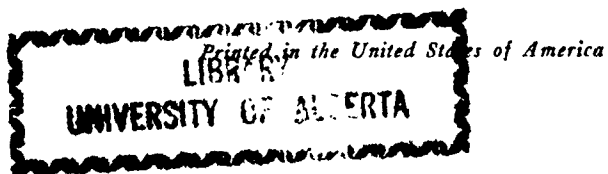
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## PROLOGUE

SINCE Colonel Jordan ruled at Oulton Grange the tractor has banished the ox-team, and the car the farmer's rig. Colonization has rolled like a swift and rather turbid flood across the Canadian plains, and landmarks the Pioneers knew are swept away for good. Jordan and his sportsmen farmers are gone, but the flood, turning at the Rockies, rolls north to the Peace River, and will stop only where summer is too short to ripen wheat.

Yet the time is not long since. The Canadian Pacific had crossed the Rockies by the Kicking Horse, and on the Red River flats Winnipeg sprang fast. The town was built of lumber and the citizens burned wood. Sometimes, when the thermometer was twenty degrees below, the wood was green. Good land was five dollars an acre and much might be pre-empted for a registration fee. Portage and Brandon were quiet market settlements; and then, but for the little stores and hotels by the locomotive water-tanks, the track to Regina rolled across a wilderness.

The country is stern, but, in summer, beautiful. When the snow melts, sparkling sloos occupy the hollows, and the bleached turf is checkered by vivid green. Then the birches in the bluffs open shining leaves, red lilies roll in the wind, and wild strawberries dot the banks. On the high tablelands the sun is hot, but rushing winds from the Pacific roll white

clouds across the sky. In the morning one smells the wild peppermint in the grass and senses a strange, keen freshness that perhaps comes only at daybreak on the Plains and on the North Atlantic.

In early summer, fires creep about the grass, smoke dims the horizon, and at night red reflections shine. In hot July afternoons, the clouds get dark and thunder crashes, but the storm soon rolls east, and the wheat needs the rain. Sometimes, however, when the wheat goes yellow, hail cuts the stalks like a reaper's knife; sometimes at dusk the thermometer drops, and the milky ears shrivel in the frost.

For the most part, on the high plains, the snow is light and hardy range horses scrape the thin covering from the grass. Now and then, however, a blizzard lifts the dry, white stuff, and in the blinding, icy fog one cannot see one's homestead a hundred yards off. Where shelter cannot be found, man and beast perish in the storm, and sometimes, when the cordwood pile gets low, careless settlers freeze behind thin shiplap walls. The Northwest sternly eliminates the slack.

When Jordan built the Grange, Assiniboia was at length a white man's country. The *Metis* half-breeds were gone, the Blackfoot were herded back to their reserves, and Anglo-Saxon farmers pushed into an empty land. For long there was no road but the steel track, and one might ride for a hundred miles and not stop for a fence. Where the small frame settlements sprang, trails, torn by wagon-wheels, curved back north and south.

Few farmers bred stock, but as a rule oxen broke the virgin sod. One sowed red-Fyffe wheat and oats, burned off the straw, and allowed the soil to rest in



summer fallow. In the sand belts, stable litter helped to bind the trails over which the wheat must be hauled. Grass was not sown; one cut hay where the stuff grew long in the dry sloos. Coal could not be got. The birch and poplar bluffs supplied cordwood, and one hauled the thin logs four or five miles in a high-wheeled wagon. To wait until a bobsledge might be used was rash.

As a rule, the stove-pipe pierced the kitchen roof, and in the upper room beds were moved as near as possible to the warm iron. When the thermometer touched zero, one woke about three o'clock and went down to fill the stove. When the cold again got biting, day had begun to break. All houses, however, had not upper rooms. Some were dug-outs, and for the most part the stables were built of poles and sod.

A settler who plowed up nigger-heads used the stones to line his shallow well. Over wide belts the water was alkaline, and where the well was not lined, in summer the gophers, tunnelling for moisture, were drowned and tainted all one drank. Yet sometimes in an alkali belt one might find a sparkling creek where the water was cold and sweet.

Nobody perhaps thought to get rich, but land was cheap and the wide plains called. Labor and stern frugality helped the best type to hold on; the unfit went broke. Ten per cent. was the current interest, and until the wheat was harvested bills were not met. Then the storekeeper reckoned up and frequently took the greater part of the crop. If the crop were very small, the farmer started, secretly, for the Pacific slope, and chalked an ironical farewell to his creditors on his door.

The earliest to prosper were hard men from Dakota plains and Scots-Canadians from the Ontario bush, whose habit was to labor fourteen hours a day; but sometimes another sort made good. The English, for the most part, were Londoners; sons of small professional men, city clerks, and so forth. All the chances were against them, and none perhaps knew his job. Some froze, and some crossed the frontier, but the rest held on. Their pluck, at all events, was good, and where one must pay for every mistake, one learns fast.

At one or two spots another Old Country type, for a time, established small, exclusive settlements. They were sportsmen and gentlemen colonists, like the old Virginians, and knew much about dogs and horses. All were athletic and some had known hardship in England's frontier wars. Nobody doubted their courage, and their pride was invincible, but their talents were not utilitarian, and where the others went ahead they, as a rule, went back. Now all perhaps are gone.

It is not very long since, but where the trails curved about the bluffs, spacious brick homesteads, with barns and windmill pumps, now stand by the graded roads. Automobiles and telephones link up the back blocks, and along the spreading railroad tracks grain elevators rise like castle towers. The farmer sows wheat that, for the most part, ripens before the frost in fall, and beef cattle crowd the stockyards. The men who bore the lean years have conquered, and where the *bulls* hauled their wagons to the settlement their swift cars run.

Yet sometimes one looks back, and pictures the empty grassland rolling to the horizon. One sees

## PROLOGUE

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the red lilies toss and smells the peppermint. The country was stern but beautiful, and since all progress must be paid for, something of its romance has vanished like the buffalo and the Frontiersman.





## THE FRONTIERSMAN



# THE FRONTIERSMAN

## I

### THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

THE late afternoon was fine, and Alan Hale went slowly up the hill from the Grand Trunk depot at Montreal. Alan knew the city, but he knew Cambridge and London better, and since he was last his uncle's guest six or seven years had gone. Now he rather doubted his welcome, and when, an hour since, he reached the house on Sherbrook Avenue, to find his aunt had gone out was some relief. James Bryce, of course, would not be home until work stopped at the bank.

For some time he had wandered aimlessly about the city, but when he went up St. James' his step was light and he carried himself like an athlete. He had, in fact, played football for the University and rowed in his college boat. He might perhaps have gone farther, but his friends were numerous and his talents, so to speak, diffuse. Trainers declared Hale's habit was to *spread* himself. All that, however, was done with, and Alan imagined he might soon be forced to concentrate.

When he stopped by the cathedral, one or two French-Canadian girls, crossing the little square, gave him an interested glance. Alan was rather an attractive young fellow and marked by a graceful carelessness. The girls were pretty, and he gave them a friendly smile. They went faster and, sit-

ting down on a bench under a tree, he pulled out a silver cigarette-case. When he opened a silver matchbox, a battered, dusty loafer at the end of the bench looked up.

"You're a stranger, Bud? I guess they've just dumped you off the Dominion boat?"

Alan understood the remark. At that time Canadians were frugal, and usually rolled the cigarettes they smoked; American cigarette packets carried an expensive duty stamp. Moreover, Canadian matches were sold in blocks, from which one broke them off, and were called, accurately, silent smellers.

"No," he said, "although I bought these things in England, I'm Canadian; but it's not at all important. Will you take a smoke?"

"I surely will," said the other, and shook from a shabby skin bag a pinch or two of fine black dust. "That's all the makings I got. Quebec buffalo dung; a white man can't smoke the stuff! I hiked in from Point Charles, where I didn't get the job I hoped. The road was dusty and a man must have a drink."

"*Je n'en vois pas*," said Alan, and resumed: "However, you are not an old-Canada man."

"That's so," agreed the other, with a touch of pride. "If I was a blasted *habitant*, I might get me a job; but I was fired in Toronto because I was not a Scot. The proper place for white men is the United States. Anyhow, I have a townie at Three Rivers who would treat me right, and since I might make it under a freight car, I'll see what's doing at the railroad yards."

"Oh, well, you might want a smoke, and if you like the cigarettes, you can take the lot."



The wayfarer did so, and rather unwillingly gave back the silver case. He got up, and when he slouched across the square Alan smiled. His impulse was to pull out his wallet, but his luck in the Dominion boat's smoking-room had not been good. Ten days from Liverpool was then the record, and in ten days some money melted. Besides, he thought James Bryce would not be generous. In the meantime, he himself could not. In fact, if old Jim were nasty, he might be forced to start for the golden West.

Breaking a fresh packet of cigarettes, he looked about. Under the little trees the shade was pleasantly cool, and fine music seemed to fall from the great cathedral dome. Alan did not know the office, but the boys' voices were clear and melodious. Behind the trees a row of open one-horse cabs waited, and some with passengers rolled up the hill from the Grand Trunk depot; the C.P.R.'s palatial station was not yet built. Two or three hundred yards off was a church with a tall spire; and then, behind St. Catharine's, the wooded mountain went up. There was no smoke and the sky was crystal blue. Montreal was a beautiful, clean city, dotted by quiet, leafy squares.

Alan, however, imagined he might not stop for long, and his business, like the hobo's, was to get himself a job. The career he had but a few weeks since thought to follow was now impossible, and he must pay for his folly. Unless his uncle helped, to get a good post at a Montreal bank or merchant's office might be hard, and in the province of Quebec the French *habitants* monopolized the jobs at which one used one's muscles. However, his father's

friends in Ontario were perhaps not yet gone, and men were needed in the lone Northwest. The drawback was, one must buy one's ticket.

Although Alan had not bothered about money, he was not rashly extravagant, and when he left Cambridge he had paid his debts. If he had not led the blasted rag, he might have remained; but for some time the dons had got their knife in him. One stated that raw Canadian humor jarred and Alan's might perhaps go better at McGill. Alan laughed. He certainly had shown the sarcastic swine what a Canadian could do. The trouble was the don and some others had done for him.

He speculated about his being sent to an English public school. His father was English, and for two or three years his holidays were spent at a country rectory. His relations were not rich, and he did not think them remarkably kind. Anyhow, when he went to Cambridge they left him alone.

He lighted a fresh cigarette and looked farther back, to a little town in Ontario. A wooden factory towered above the frame houses by the noble river's bank, and at night its rows of windows shone. Big shade trees bordered the quiet streets, and behind the town were dark pinewoods. His jolly, indulgent father was agent for the Laurentian Bank; the bank-house was spacious, and Alan was happy there. It was, however, long since, and the picture got indistinct.

His father died in Dakota. Alan thought it strange, but the bank perhaps transacted business in the United States. Afterwards he and his mother went to Montreal. For all her kindness, she ruled him firmly, and she had not talked much about his

father. Then she was willing for him to go to England, but when he was at Winchester she died. Alan knew she had loved his father; it looked as if she brooded and drooped after he was gone.

He pondered another thing. His father was not rich, and he doubted if his mother's inheritance were large. Yet he had gone to Cambridge and had not been forced to pinch. Well, his uncle was trustee, and perhaps the old fellow had met the bill. He must find out, and he imagined James Bryce would be frank.

By and by he saw the shadow had crept across the square. The music in the cathedral had stopped, the cabs on the stand were gone, and Alan pulled out his watch. His uncle would soon be back from the office and he must front the rather daunting interview.

When he went up Sherbrook Avenue a carriage stopped in front of a large stone house, and Alan, crossing the road, opened the door and gave his aunt his hand. Janet Bryce was tall and nobly built. Although her flowing dress was perhaps an embarrassment when she balanced on the carriage step, she got down like a girl. Her hat was large, and her black clothes, as the fashion was, were molded tight to bust and waist; when she moved the thin smooth material rustled crisply. Her hair was white, her nose and glance were aquiline, but sometimes her grey eyes twinkled with frank humor. Miss Bryce was a good example of the Northern type, and her beauty had rather ripened than vanished with her youth. Although her father was but a Scots forester who had built a small sawmill in the Ontarian bush, her carriage and talk, as a rule, were

dignified. Alan knew her for a very good sort; when Queen Victoria ruled, one did not call a lady a sport.

"I like your English manners, laddie; but ye might put on your hat," she said.

Alan smiled. His aunt's Scots was an affectation she sometimes used, for, as far as he knew, she was but for two or three years at Edinburgh when the sawmill prospered.

"You command good manners, ma'am. One doesn't try to account for it; one mechanically plays up."

A maid-servant opened the big door, and in the spacious hall Janet Bryce kissed her nephew. Then she gave him a long, searching glance.

"I had hoped to be back before ye, but they kept me at the kirk bazaar. For all the news we got, I'm thinking ye have not taken much hurt at Cambridge. Ye have a look o' your mother."

"She was like you," said Alan, in a sober voice. "I thought her beautiful, but one felt she got tired, and somehow her freshness went. Yours does not."

Janet's glance was watchfully thoughtful; Alan had begun to wonder! He must soon take a knock, but she was glad hers was not the hand to give the blow. For her sister's sake, she loved the boy.

"My youth's long by," she said. "The best gifts we get cannot be kept. I am an old woman, and you are now a man. It is time ye had done with a raw laddie's tricks. But you will tell me about it."

They went to the old-fashioned drawing-room. The furniture was walnut, clumsily carved, and the chairs were covered with sage-green stuff like velvet. Where one's back rested antimacassars hung, and a

gilded chandelier broke the molded ceiling. All was frankly ugly, but carried a stamp of solid strength, and the material was the best that could be got. Alan remembered that when he was a boy he had hated the gloomy house; somehow its stern orderliness oppressed him.

His aunt, however, waited to hear about his exploit, and he rather awkwardly began his narrative. At Cambridge he had thought the adventure humorous, but somehow the humor had vanished and he knew himself a fool. The crowded hour was gone; the consequences must yet be faced. Moreover, he saw his aunt was not at all amused, and although she was sometimes, like her brother, inscrutable, he knew she weighed his hesitating tale.

On the whole, Janet's keenest emotion was something like relief. She admitted with Scots philosophy that it might have been worse. At all events, the lad was honest, and he dared be frank to her. It looked as if he were altogether her sister's son, and she had feared to get a hint of his father's vein. He was a fool, but he had not been shabby, and to some extent she imagined he had taken his accomplices' punishment. Yet she was pitiful, for his punishment had but begun.

"That is all," he said. "Since no defense is possible, I must bear the consequences. I expect my uncle is logically annoyed?"

Janet thought his embarrassed confession his best defense, but she did not know if her brother would agree. James's code was utilitarian and he was hard. In the meantime she must not encourage false hopes.

"James is logical and I'm thinking you may need some pluck," she said. "Folly must be paid for, but

you perhaps are lucky because you yourself will get the bill while you yet are young."

"I hope my pluck is as good as another's, but I'd like to know my sentence. I suppose my uncle will soon be back?"

"He was called to Ottawa and expected to stop for two or three days."

Alan frowned. He admitted he was anxious, and to wait was hard. Janet noted his annoyance and sympathized. Her folks' habit was to front a crisis.

"My luck has, rather obviously, not begun to turn," he said.

"If you paid your debts, I expect you are not rich," Janet remarked. "Then on board the steamers I suppose one plays at the cards. Well, I'm your aunt, and if a bill for a hundred dollars would help——"

Alan smiled, but a touch of color flushed his skin.

"When I was a boy you were generous, but you yourself stated it's time I grew up. Perhaps the strange thing is, I did pay my debts, although my pals seemed to think it, so to speak, isn't done. You are kind, but one doesn't use one's relations."

"One does not borrow from women? I have known some who might," said Janet Bryce. "You inherit good blood, my lad. You are your mother's son."

For a moment or two she brooded, but Alan noted the sparkle in her eyes. For all her white hair, his aunt was beautiful, and somehow she was thoroughbred. In fact, until she took off her large hat, she was like a Gainsborough picture. Yet her first school was a log house in the Ontarian wilds, and

the founder of the Bryce fortune was a rude Scots forester.

"To some extent, at all events, I'm my father's son," he said, and although he thought her glance got keen, he resumed with a laugh: "Anyhow, I have not inherited the queer Scottish habit of claiming descent from gentlefolks nobody much about. All the same, I went for a walking excursion to the Border hills. Grey bents and ragged heather roll across the uplands. Sometimes a bleak farmhouse dominates a *knowe*; the lonely villages are built of whinstone blocks. Along the sheltered *waters* kylo cattle feed, but for the most part, all you see is the black-faced sheep. A bleak, hard country that never, I think, supported fastidious gentlefolk. But you perhaps were there?"

"Thirty years since," said Janet. "I mind we drove twenty miles across the moors in a high *machine*. The farm town sits on the braeside by a bit sparkling burn, and the winged Spur is carved above the door."

"Exactly! The Spur is the Johnstons' badge, but for long the landlords were Buccleugh Scotts. Your folk were tenant farmers, and the only Bryce in the neighborhood is a blacksmith, who knows nothing about you."

"For a' that, we were lairds," said Janet firmly. "In the kirkyard by the lochan our names are on the stones; back to seventeen hundred, Bryces o' Mailzie." She stopped as if she pondered, and resumed in colloquial English: "But you were at your father's home in the South."

"When I last went my grandfather was gone, but

the church is open, and I saw his record, freshly cut, in the tablet on the wall: *For thirty years Vicar of this parish.* A slow river, bordered by polled willows, curves about the flat cornfields, and the village is buried among tall English elms. All is quiet and fertile, but somehow it did not move me like the Johnstons' country."

Janet smiled, and Alan sensed a satisfaction he thought queer.

"The grey moor's your motherland; and of all the historians, poets, explorers, and soldiers who made Scotland famous, the uplands between Tweed and Cree bred the larger half. You are a Borderer, my lad, and have some ground to boast your inheritance, but, like others, it has drawbacks. I'm a romantic old woman, but you have brought me where I wanted to go, and sometimes I'm practical.

"Our folk are hard and calculating, and all that's ours we hold. We are famous for our grim soberness and our industry. All know that type of Scot, your uncle's type; but there is another. Our ancestors were rude as the grey whinstone, and the vein is not yet run out. Sometimes a reckless devil lurks in the Borderer, and one needs to watch. We have the drawbacks of our qualities, and when that devil takes control, a Borderer is not to hold or bind. But my lecture is finished and we'll talk about something else. You visited with your college friends. Was there not an English girl who was sorry when you went?"

"On the whole, I doubt," said Alan. "Then, you see, in the circumstances, I wasn't keen to explain why I was forced to start. Now I think about it, all



the girls I knew were attractive, but none had the charm and dignity that mark my romantic aunt."

Janet gave him a smile. She thought she knew all she had wanted to know about her nephew, and she was satisfied.

"Oh, well," she said, "I must see that dinner is served."

## II

### THE RECKONING

**J**AMES BRYCE was president of the Laurentian Bank, and lumber men and merchant importers knew his private room behind the spacious, pillared office in the narrow street at Montreal. The bank helped to move the giant log rafts that then floated down the St. Lawrence, and by its help the tinplate ships were loaded at Avonmouth and Liverpool. The importers were merchants in the Scottish sense, and at their warehouses one might buy a pocket-knife or a thousand tons of railway steel.

Bryce, however, had wide interests. When others were daunted, he boldly supported the Canadian Pacific scheme, and now the great railroad touched Vancouver, his money was scattered like seed corn where the settlements sprang along the Western track. Some thought the soil barren, and settlers certainly were broken by frost and hail, but Bryce looked in front and knew when to wait. Moreover, it looked as if he knew whom to trust, and the few who tried to cheat him paid for their rashness. He was hard, some called him pitiless, but his word carried the weight of a stamped agreement, and all he claimed was justly his.

The train from Ottawa arrived about six o'clock, and when he joined his sister and nephew in his spa-

cious dining-room the light had begun to go. Dinner was, as usual, a sober function. Quiet maid-servants carried in the covered dishes, and Bryce carved the large joint of red meat. He was strongly built, his hands were large, and he used the buckhorn-handled knife with the efficiency that marked all he did. Wine was not served, but after a time Janet gave them green tea in beautiful cups of Oriental china. The Bryces were conservative, and Alan thought the green tea a survival of the sawmill tradition.

At length the plates were carried off, and Janet superintended the folding of the Irish linen tablecloth. Her black clothes flowed about her in voluminous folds, and the smooth material reflected the light. A large white and pink cameo fastened the neck. Alan thought her stately; he did not know a better word. When the old shining mahogany was uncovered, a servant put a copper spirit kettle on a little stand and a large square decanter on a mat. The sugar-bowl and toddy-spoon were old Sheffield plate; the globular glasses, engraved at the rim, and faintly tinged by blue, were made at Waterford. All were put down as if their arrangement were a sort of ritual, and Janet cut a lemon in even halves.

At the end of the table, James Bryce hunched his thick shoulders and knitted his shaggy brows. Side-whiskers followed the sweep of his firm jaw, his stiff white shirt bulged and crackled when he breathed. Alan noted the glance Janet gave her brother, and imagined she signalled the old fellow to be merciful. He held back the door for her and tried to brace up. Although he admitted he owed his uncle much, he was not going to be bullied. Bryce

brewed some whisky punch, and the smell of the spirit and lemon stole about the room.

"A man's drink! I expect you claim you are a man?" he said. "You will take a glass?"

Alan thanked him, and Bryce resumed:

"You were expelled from the University."

"The phrase is, sent down, sir."

"The other will serve. I do not know the classical root, but it carries a sort of finality, and implies *thrown out*. Anyhow, the authorities are resolved not to have you back, and we must indulge them. How much do you owe the Cambridge storekeepers? I recommend you to be frank."

"Before I went I met all claims."

"That's something. In the circumstances, I reckon your capital is not large?"

"Ten dollars, sir. You cabled the steamship office, and I acknowledge your kindness, but my first impulse was to buy an emigrant ticket. However, the Dominion line people knew I was your relation and I doubted if my aunt would see the joke."

Bryce cocked a shaggy eyebrow, and although he did not smile his mouth went crooked. The lad was better stuff than he had thought, but he would need some pluck.

"The Dominion line do not carry steerage passengers across for ten dollars."

"My wad was larger, but the rest melted in the *Sarnia's* smoking-room. Well, I admit at Cambridge I was a careless fool and rashly threw away advantages I ought to have used. I rather think that was all, and I want to get to work. You are my trustee, but I expect you have had enough, and after my recent exploit I feel I mustn't bother you——"

"You want me to account for my stewardship?"

"I rather want to know where I stand," said Alan, in an apologetic voice.

"Very well. To begin with, you have turned down the career your mother, with my agreement, planned for you in the Old Country. Perhaps you know your father was not rich?"

"For some time his pay was good, and my mother inherited something."

"When your father died he owed the bank a large sum."

The blood leaped to Alan's skin. Although the old fellow was hard, his habit was to be accurate.

"But he was the bank's *servant*——"

"There was the trouble," Bryce said grimly. "You are entitled to particulars, but had you stopped in England, I had not thought you need know."

He lighted a cigar, and for a few moments Alan waited. Where he was sometimes puzzled, he began to see a light and his heart beat, but he tried for calm, and while Bryce pierced and rolled his cigar, he mechanically noted the blue flame under the spirit kettle and the reflection of the glass in the shining mahogany. On the opposite wall was a large engraving of Landseer's hunted stag.

"I was against your mother's marriage," Bryce resumed in a dry voice. "Dick Hale had neither money nor occupation, and frankly admitted that he emigrated in order to mend his fortune. Yet I do not think it altogether accounted for his marrying."

Alan saw his uncle tried to be just. He was afraid and humiliated, but he must find out as much as possible, because he imagined the old fellow would not talk about it another time.

"Then, his poverty was the obstacle?" he said.

"No. The worst obstacle was his temperament. One must pay, by money or effort, for all one gets, and where one cannot pay one must go without. For an honest man there is not another line. Your father's habit was to seize all he wanted, and so long as he was satisfied he was willing for others to bear the cost. He wanted my sister, and did not stop to think if he could support her properly. Well, I live by logical calculation, and I had no use for a man like that."

"After all, the risk was my mother's risk."

"She used your argument. Dick Hale was cultivated; he carried a sort of stamp. He had qualities, for although Hannah was romantic, she was not a fool. Anyhow, when I knew she could not be persuaded, I gave Dick a post at the Toronto office, and I think for some time she was happy. Dick was a favorite with the bank customers, and although he was not industrious, he was, I believe, a sportsman, a musician, and a first-class dancer. All women perhaps are socially ambitious, and to be courted by important people was some satisfaction for your mother. Yet I doubted——"

Bryce stopped. His large mouth was firmly set and he knitted his brows. Alan braced up. He knew he was going to get a knock.

"To be a social favorite is expensive," Bryce resumed. "When your father got embarrassed, Hannah sent for me, although I'm thinking it cost her much. Dick had physical courage; he had not the other sort. Well, I mustn't moralize. My business is to state plain facts. I went to Toronto. Dick's debts were large, and Hannah's fortune was gone.

The hurt was deep, but she yet loved her husband. A man who cannot control his extravagance is not the servant a bank ought to trust; but, for your mother's sake, I was weak. Weakness must be paid for, and three people paid for mine.

"Had Dick but been frank—he was not; to front a crisis squarely was not his habit. Afterwards, I suppose, he durst not own he had cheated me, and we found out a creditor had pushed him hard."

"Then, you paid his debts, sir?"

"I paid all I knew," Bryce replied. "The bank had an office at the quiet Ontario town you remember, and your mother agreed to Dick's banishment. The townsfolk were frugal, nobody was rich, and Hannah perhaps believed he would now go soberly. The town and our business grew, and when the agent died, to refuse Dick the post might excite our customers' curiosity. All liked him; he had a talent for making friends.

"Well, he got the post, and it began to look as if I had not run much risk; and then, late one fall, he went to a conference at Winnipeg. It was the year speculators on the Chicago board of trade tried to hold up Western wheat. On the second day Dick did not go to the conference, and in the evening our Winnipeg agent heard he had engaged a team and rig at a livery stable. He perhaps thought if he took the railroad for Pembina he might be stopped by telegram at the frontier. Soon after he started, the first snow blew across the plains."

Alan did not look up. He was sick with humiliation.

"My father had speculated? But he died in Dakota. I suppose you let him go?"

"I was the bank's president, and although I made good the sum my trustfulness cost the shareholders, I durst not connive at robbery. Dick's luck, at length, had turned. An exhausted team stopped one morning at a homestead on American soil. The rig was broken and a wheel was locked, but the farmer followed the marks in the snow. At an awkward corner, where the trail went down to a ravine, Dick was frozen in the brush. Well, I do not know if your mother's heart was broken. We are not emotional stuff, but her pride was crushed, and in two or three years she died."

Alan lifted his bent head. A few moments since he was hot with shame; now he shivered and the color had left his skin. Bryce looked straight in front and his fist was clenched. The tragedy was not done with. Its shadow yet touched the banker, and Alan began to see that it might for long follow him. The fault was not his, but there was no use in rebelling, and his body went slack.

"Since we knew you were sent down, I have pondered what we ought to do with you," Bryce concluded.

"You twice paid my father's debt, and I expect I went to the University at your cost," said Alan in a hoarse voice. "In the circumstances, I'd sooner do something for myself."

"I see some obstacles. Had you stopped in England, I might have helped you push ahead. Montreal and Toronto command the trade of Canada, and I doubt if you would get a post in a first-class merchant house."



"A cautious merchant would refuse to trust a thief's son? After all, I have not much talent for business, but my body's strong."

"In the province of Quebec, the *habitants* monopolize the jobs where muscle is required. You might go West, but I do not see you handling forty-foot rails with a construction gang, and nobody would hire you at a lumber camp. A good chopper must use the axe when he is a boy."

"Farming's our standard industry. Homesteaders in Manitoba ask for men."

"That is so," Bryce agreed dryly. "The drawback is, a hired man must know his job. Somebody might engage you for ten dollars a month, and you would work from sun-up until daylight went. The railroad pamphlets state a man who has five hundred dollars can live on a pre-empted farm. It is perhaps possible, but men with the necessary qualities are not numerous. Anyhow, you have not five hundred dollars."

Alan's mouth got tight. His capital was ten dollars, and it looked as if he were done with. Canadian newspapers love a romantic tale, and he pictured their dwelling on his father's exploit; moreover, he pictured the Bryces' helpless rage. His uncle's planning for him to stop in England was logical, but he had recklessly turned down the chance the old fellow had given him.

"Very well," said Bryce. "Since your plans will not work, we will experiment with mine. I twice paid for your father's folly, and I claim my debt. You want to farm, and you shall farm, but for the winter you will take a post in the Goodwin Hardware Company's office. Goodwin knows who you

are, but for six months he agrees to try you out. You will get, and live upon, a store clerk's pay, and for two evenings in the week a clerk from the bank will help you study bookkeeping. On Sundays you will dine with us and go to church with your aunt. Well? You perhaps do not like my proposition?"

"I cannot refuse, sir," said Alan moodily. "All the same, I do not see what bookkeeping has to do with farming."

Bryce gave him a queer smile.

"I was not at a University, but I imagine *farmer* is Norman-French, and when first used in England did not imply a cultivator. A farmer must handle teams and plows, but his pay for laborers' work is a laborer's pay. The reward he hopes to get is a profit on the capital he employs. At Goodwin's office you will study how money is used and accounted for."

"My talent is rather for squandering money," Alan rejoined. "If your plan implies that you might help me buy a farm, you are kind, but very rash. Since I might let you down another time, I'd sooner join the North-West Mounted Police. The *Star* states the Regina officers are looking for recruits."

"There is a drawback. The Royal North-West followed your father to the frontier. Since he was one of the two or three fugitives who have baffled them, I imagine they do not forget."

Alan said nothing. His uncle was pitilessly logical, and he knew himself beaten.

"My object was not to buy a farm for you," Bryce went on. "I thought, if you were competent, you might some time superintend my farm in As-

siniboia. When the snow melts, you will get to work at Fairmead. Are you willing?"

"I'll go, sir," said Alan. "You are kinder than I thought. In fact, in all the circumstances, I do not see——"

Bryce got up. "For one thing, you are my sister's son. Then you owe me much, and you might make good. Sometimes I risk a bet."

### III

#### BURNS' NIGHT

**A**T Montreal winter is long, and in the Old Country Alan had forgotten the sharpness of the Canadian frost. He was instinctively fastidious and he hated his cheap boarding-house. The frost pierced the lapped board walls, water froze in his nine-foot bedroom, and sometimes proper cleanliness was impossible. The double windows were fastened tight, the air one breathed was stale, and the house smelt of warm iron, cooking, and crowded humanity. When the bleak dining-room was cleared after supper, the hard wooden chairs were moved to the radiator pipes, and shivering groups played checkers and disputed drearily.

Yet, if one but had money, the city's attractions were numerous. There perhaps was the worst trouble, because the contrast hurt. Alan heard sleigh-bells, and sometimes in the evening watched jolly parties take the snow-bound road. He saw lights flare on the slopes where the swift toboggans plunged; he knew the glittering ice palace and the covered skating rinks; but since he must meet his weekly bills, he for the most part stopped outside.

Sometimes he wandered about the Grand Trunk depot and studied the railroad maps. The unclean, sooty station was the gate of freedom, and when the black locomotive started he pictured their flight to

the South. Sometimes he counted his thin roll of bills and calculated. If he were sternly frugal, he might presently buy a ticket for New York, and perhaps reach a cotton port by the warm Gulf Stream. Where he went did not matter, so long as nobody knew who he was and he escaped from the frozen North. At Montreal, he, so to speak, was in bondage, and youth was entitled to be free; but, as a rule, Alan swore and threw the folder map on the track.

He had sold his freedom for an evening's rag, and he carried his father's debts. James Bryce was a stern creditor, but Alan had engaged to stop and, he supposed, to take his father's punishment. Well, although he sometimes hated his uncle, he refused to cheat. He had, perhaps, inherited something of the Bryce uprightness, but he dared not cheat. He began to feel he must not, like his father, take the easy road. That road went downhill.

On the whole, he did not grumble about his occupation. Behind the counter he sold skates and frying pans; in the counting-house he helped to fix the price of British goods in Canadian currency. The St. Lawrence was frozen, but logging chains and horseshoe iron came up by the Intercolonial from the open ports; tinplates to cover Quebec churches' wooden spires and black Canada plates for barn roofs were stocked when the goods were cheap and steamers could reach the wharves. Liverpool merchants reckoned by tons, hundredweights, and quarters. At Montreal one sold iron at so many cents a pound. Then one scored out two ciphers and the sum was stated in dollars. Alan admitted the Canadian plan had advantages. He noted a queer thing: although he had studied at the University

and the clerks at Government schools, their calculations were swifter and more accurate than his.

On Sundays he visited at the house on Sherbrook and carried his aunt's Bible and metrical Psalter to a Presbyterian church. The books were large, and Alan imagined might safely be left at the church; but Janet Bryce, born in Ontario, faithfully carried out the old Scots ritual. For an hour and forty-five minutes Alan used stern self-control. He loved rhythm and music, and the limping meter jarred; then the minister's school was the old school, and he laboriously entangled his audience in intricate Calvinistic argument. Yet Alan admitted he had forfeited his right to rebel, and he hoped his aunt did not know how much he was bored.

His expensive winter coat was Janet Bryce's gift, and for three or four Sundays she presented him to her friends. They were important socially and their husbands helped control the trade of Montreal. Alan imagined they knew his father's shame and perhaps knew he was a store clerk; but Janet indicated that all who acknowledged her must acknowledge her nephew. Although she was perhaps moved by the clan spirit, he liked her pluck. In fact, he thought her a gallant old soul, and knew her for a great lady.

At the midday cold dinner James Bryce was polite, but did not inquire about his nephew's progress. Alan imagined the old fellow had otherwise informed himself. Sometimes, when Janet was not about, he invited Alan to play at the dams, and with Bryce for an antagonist, Alan admitted draughts was a better game than he had thought. Soon after the first piece was moved, the old fellow seemed to

know the end. He worked by rule and, weighing the obstacles, carried out his plans. Somehow his stern efficiency was daunting.

Alan but once while he was at Montreal saw his uncle in another vein; and then the night was Burns' night, when the soberest Scots relax. Janet and Alan had gone to a patriotic concert, and soon after they got back to the house two jingling sledges stopped at the door. Feet trampled in the hall and somebody began to sing in a cracked voice:

*"Kind, kind was she——"*

Janet got up and shrugged.

"It is but once a year! They'll be needing whisky punch."

When Bryce and four or five more came in Alan doubted if need were the proper word; the musician, at all events, had already had enough. The group's advance was cautious, as if some did not trust their legs, and one indicated his snowy boots.

"I would have left my rubbers on the mat, Miss Bryce, but I doubt if I could pu' them aff. When a man comes to three-score he's no very supple in the back, but I'm thinking it will yet be long before you fin' out."

"I am frankly an old woman," Janet replied. "On Burns' night I am willing for old friends to be young again."

"Ye are a kind and gracious lady," another remarked. "We dined at the St. James' and they did not pit us oot, but Jim thought we ought to gang. Some guests were English, and one respects the weaker brethren."

The gentleman was an officer of the Presbyterian church, which perhaps accounted for the phrase; the

rest were merchant importers, heads of steamship offices and lumber companies. As a rule, they were sternly sober and the English they used was good. Alan, studying them with a smile, remembered his aunt had talked about the reckless devil that lurks in the sober Scot.

"We'll need the kettle and some lemons," Bryce remarked. "Burns' night is no' over until twelve o' the clock."

"We have an hour," said one. "In an hour, if ye have the will, much may be done, and on this night o' a' the nights, a Scot's duty, and pleasure, is to celebrate the Pious and Immortal memory——"

"Oh, man, ye're not at the lodge," another reminded him.

Laughter drowned the speech, and Alan thought he saw the joke. Since Montreal is perhaps three parts French and Catholic, in the fourth part Orangemen are numerous. He, however, saw Janet was gone, and he ought to go; but Bryce stopped him and Goodwin gave him a friendly nod. The merchant's height was six feet, his eyes were sunk under shaggy brows, and his high cheek-bones strained his skin. At the office he hardly spoke, and his look was inscrutable, but the store was famous, and as far as Calgary smiths asked for Goodwin's stuff. Now he smiled, and when the others sat down round the table he beckoned and shoved back a chair.

"Ye are an industrious young fella', but sometimes one takes a holiday," he remarked, and gave Alan a cigar.

Six months since, Alan's ambition was rather to be thought a blood than an industrious clerk; but he glanced carelessly at Bryce. His uncle was not the



sort to miss a sign like that. Bryce, however, brewed whisky punch, and if he was interested, Alan did not know.

The reflections from fine-cut glass twinkled on the old dark mahogany; one smelt spirit and lemons, and Landseer's stag got indistinct behind the blue cigar-smoke. The glasses went round the table, and the punch sank in the bowl, but Alan thought his uncle's guests got soberer. The thing was puzzling, and perhaps his surprise was obvious, for one next him smiled.

"They are Scots. Hearts and heids o' aik!"

"Ache?" said Alan. "It's possible, in the morning. So far as politeness allows, I'm trying to use caution, but my head aches now."

"Ye're a humorist. In England they call it oak."

"I was unconsciously humorous," Alan apologized. "But now I think about it, Carlyle talked about pouring negus down a cast-iron pump."

"It's like the man. Ye may see him, modeled to the life, in the Edinbro' museum; a crabbed, thrawn old deevil, who never was young. Poor Rob was another sort; he was kindly flesh and blood."

"Bobbie for a night!" said Goodwin. "A man needs to be minded o' his humanity. The morn we'll forget him and follow the other. After all, he was our sort and he preached efficiency."

Alan knew them a grimly efficient lot. At the proper time in the morning each would be at his office, and would, moreover, talk like a Canadian. Two or three, in fact, were born on Canadian soil, but on New Year's eve and Burns' night they were, for a few hours, romantic sentimentalists.

One began to talk about politics. At Ottawa,

manufacturers claimed protection for Canadian ironworks. Goodwin turned his head.

"It will not pay," he said in colloquial English. "Canada lives by exporting her raw produce. Would you tax the lumber men and farmers to enrich one or two rolling mills?"

"When population grows, raw produce diminishes," another rejoined. "Our forests are our main asset, but we begin to cut farther back from the river banks. In twenty years I expect we will have cut all the good logs near water, rail haulage is expensive, and in Europe you must meet the competition from the Baltic ports. In Ontario all good farming land will soon be taken up, and you cannot plow the Laurentian rocks. You have heard about the farmer who shoots his seed across the stones with a scatter-gun?"

"What about the West?" somebody asked. "Manitoba is shipping wheat at Fort William; at Winnipeg, Ogilvies are milling first-grade flour, and we begin to get cattle from the foothills ranching belt."

Alan saw the group was interested. When one talked of Canada's advance, they were Canadian merchants, and it almost looked as if the punch they had consumed were but the national green tea.

"For long, progress will be slow. Frost and hail cut the crops; farms and stock are mortgaged, and Western storekeepers cannot meet their bills. So far, the Canadian Pacific is an expensive experiment, and we have got to wait for results."

"Range horses are coming from the Territories. Johnston bought a span," another remarked with a twinkle.

"That is so," Johnston agreed. "The team smashed my new sleigh. Only a Bow River man could drive the brutes. But Bryce backs the railroad, and when he bets he wins."

"To bet is not my business; sometimes I invest," Bryce rejoined. "Well, I have two or three square miles of wheat land near the Assiniboine, and I've settled a colony of relations on smaller blocks. The bank's capital is going to the Territories, and our habit is to get our money back. To prophesy is risky, but, if you like, I'll state my views——"

He drained his glass, his eyes sparkled, and his gesture commanded his audience's attention. Alan imagined liquor accounted for something, but when the old fellow began to talk his speech was slow and deliberate. Well, somebody had remarked that the Scots had heads of oak.

"From Winnipeg to the dry tablelands the rolling plain runs west for four hundred miles. The grass is short, the scattered woods are but large enough to supply the settlers' fuel, and the black soil grows the world's finest wheat. Summer is short and, so far, early frost cuts the crop; the farmers are poor, and as a rule use ox-teams and the single-furrow plow. Fertilizers are not used; they rest the land in summer fallow. Yet in the fall their wheat blocks the track and fills the steamboats on the Lakes. By and by botanists will give us seed that ripens soon, and power plows will help us sow when the frost has but left the ground. We have got the soil; all we need is proper tools and capital, and I reckon both will be supplied.

"Let's look ahead. Cheap corn is the beginning and main support of organized industry, and if we

are not daunted by a risk, the grain belt will enrich Canada. Some mortgaged Pioneers may well go broke; but they blaze the trail and help folk study the obstacles their successors will remove. There is another thing; the wheat belt is *ours*. We broke the *Metis* rebels, and when they went we built the track by which alone its development is possible. Our aim is to see it peopled by men of our race: all-white, industrious Anglo-Saxons. Now we haul the wheat fifteen hundred miles east to the St. Lawrence, and a single track and some old wooden propellers carry all the load. We are going to run trains a mile long on a double line, and build fleets of corn ships for the Lakes. For all that, I reckon the granary will overflow, and Canadian wheat will go *South*, down the Missouri. When population thickens, economic necessity will break the tariff walls."

"Ye will not see it, James," said one.

"That is so," Bryce agreed. "But what's it matter? Where I have sown somebody will reap. Our stock's rooted firm in Canadian soil, and fresh shoots will spring."

He stopped and, ladling out fresh punch, began to banter Johnston about his sledge team. Alan had had enough, and by and by stole away, but when he was in the snowy street he pondered his uncle's remark.

## IV

### THE GATE OF FREEDOM

UNTIL the ice broke Alan carried his load. His work at the store got easier, but he hated the cheap boarding-house and the frugality he was forced to use. For all that, until he hid away thirty dollars at the bottom of his trunk he was sternly frugal. If the strain got insupportable, the money would help him escape, and since he had studied the railroad folders, he knew where he would go. The queer thing was, when he had got the money the strain got lighter.

Sometimes he admitted he was not logical. The frontier was not far off, and in the United States a store clerk's pay was good. Alan imagined his was less than the standard rate, and he wondered whether his uncle had warned Goodwin not to be extravagant. For all his strange remark on Burns' night, Alan wanted nothing from the old fellow; but so long as the other claimed his debt, he must not cheat.

At length the snow melted, and Bryce one evening called him to his house.

"I have arranged with Goodwin for you to leave the store on Saturday," he said. "On Monday morning you will ask at the bank for Howard, who will give you one or two books and explain the system by which my farming accounts are kept. On

Tuesday you will start for Fairmead in Assiniboia, where you will be clerk and paymaster; but since your duties will not occupy you much, you will help my foreman in whatever way he thinks you useful. If you have any talent for farming, when he goes you might get his post. I do not want a gentleman bailiff; my superintendent must be able to handle horses and oxen like a teamster."

Alan was satisfied with his pay, which was fixed for twelve months. He did not think his uncle expected thanks; the old fellow had ordered him to go and seemed to reckon on his obedience. Alan rather wanted to rebel, but he imagined he would be happier at a prairie farm than at the squalid boarding-house. Moreover, he would, no doubt, earn all he got.

On Alan's last afternoon at Montreal he and his aunt went up the Mountain. In places the winding road under the bare trees was rough and steep, but Janet Bryce carried herself like a girl and boasted she could yet go where her brother could not. James, she said, was getting fat, and all he used his body for was to carry him to the bank.

Although the Mountain is not high, its top commands a noble view, and when they reached a platform by the steep crest Janet went to a bench in the sun and Alan leaned against the parapet.

Below him, the city, broken by squares where trees grew, sloped from St. Catherine's to the river flat; the cathedral dome in the foreground, and the towers of Notre-Dame farther back. All the smoke he saw floated about the steamship wharves, and the sky was hard, Canadian blue. The river shone like a looking-glass, and he knew the grey smears in the

glittering belt were ice-floes broken in the rapids at La Chine. His glance touched a green island, and then, following the long dark bridge, swept across the Quebec shore to where the hills of Vermont cut the horizon. Then he saw his aunt studied him.

"That is not your road. In the morning you start the other way," she said.

"You are keen," said Alan. "Now it's done with, I don't mind admitting that I wanted to cross the bridge, and once or twice I nearly fixed my train."

Janet gave him a sympathetic glance.

"I know; but I was not much afraid. You are Hannah's son, and our folk do not quit."

"I am Dick Hale's son. I don't altogether know why I did stop, but I suppose one hates to be beaten. Then for a long time my uncle supported me."

"James is hard; I believe he thinks he's just. He looks in front, and as a rule his plans work."

"To some extent, there's the trouble," Alan remarked. "I don't want him to plan for me. Although I have not much grounds to boast, I'd sooner plan for myself."

"To indulge your uncle for a time would not be very hard."

Alan smiled. "You are tactful, aunt. I expect you think it might be wise—prudent is perhaps the word. Well, I am willing, if it is possible, to pay my debt, but that is all I want——"

He indicated the streets and squares and the shining river.

"Montreal is a noble city, but I have thought it remarkably like a jail, and I'm eager to get away. All that bothers me is, I am going to lose you. Well, your kindness is not the sentimental sort, and let's

be practical. I'm to be clerk and paymaster; but Grier, the superintendent, may not approve, particularly if he imagines I might by and by take his post."

"You are a shrewd laddie. The Griers are my relations and yours, and if you are wisely guided, they will be your friends. Indeed, I think Keith but agreed to manage Fairmead because your uncle asked. When he went West from Manitoba he meant to pre-empt a farm."

"Then, because my uncle needed him, he was willing to let his own plans go?"

"Just that," said Janet. "James has helped the Griers, and our folk are leal. Then, although he is maybe not always as wise as he thinks, he has qualities. But I'm a boastful old woman, and the important thing is, for James' sake and your mother's sake, Keith and Rob Grier, and their cousins, the Kerrs and D'rymples, will see ye out."

"You are a queer lot," Alan remarked with a laugh. "Do you imply that because I am James Bryce's nephew I, so to speak, command the clan's support? Two Griers, the Kerrs, and the Dalrymples! Are there some more?"

"You are half English and you do not understand," Janet replied in an indulgent voice. "These men are not the sort you knew at the University. In a way, they're primitive, but they have brains to match their strong bodies. They are as nearly fearless as a man may be, they're stanch and very proud. I would not say they cultivate English manners, but they use, and look for, the natural courtesy that marks a gentleman. If they are satisfied with you,



you will have friends you can trust, and nobody you may offend will be keen to meddle with you."

"Oh, well," said Alan, smiling, "I'm not at all a swashbuckler of the Johnny Armstrong type, and where I think trouble's brewing I try to go the other way."

"Sometimes one must stop and meet the trouble."

"I can see you stopping, and if you were daunted, I think none would know, but somehow one feels you were never afraid. If your frontiersmen relations are like you, to satisfy them might be hard. You are a great lady, my dear aunt."

"My sister was a finer woman, and you are her son. If you will mind it when the strain comes, it is all I want," said Janet in a gentle voice. "But the wind gets cold, and I must help you pack your trunk."

Alan gave her his hand and she got up. He knew she did not need his help, but when one was with Janet Bryce one used the rules the old school used. Talking carelessly, they went down the hill, and when in the evening calm Alan heard locomotive bells his heart beat. He had taken his punishment, and soon the swift cars would carry him to freedom in the West.

Four days afterwards, at seven o'clock one morning, he walked through the swaying train. He was perhaps fastidious, but in his second-class car the curtains were thin, and when Victoria was queen to encounter half-dressed women embarrassed a young man. Moreover, where the track was good and the engineer let the locomotive go, one could not pull on all one's clothes in one's curtained berth. The cars

rocked and jolted; one felt the wheels leap the joints. In Canada the rails were then half the weight English engineers used for a smaller load.

On board the crowded *colonists* people were getting up, but for the most part the emigrants did not pull off their clothes and long boots before they went to bed, and some rather obviously did not wash. Alan spotted Jews and Italians, and men he thought were Poles; the others with the greasy sheepskin coats were perhaps Russians and Letts. On the whole, he thought them a frowsy and perhaps rather tragic lot, for he saw faces stamped with the dull patience that marks a wounded animal; but they no doubt were moved by hopes and ambitions, and the adventure into which they had plunged was riskier than his.

One or two cars carried Britons: laborers, artisans, and small city clerks. The clerks' ambition was to farm; Alan had talked to some who admitted modestly that they did not know much about the job. Alan himself did not, but he understood that a pre-emptor who has not much capital must in six months, with his own hands, build a house and stable, cut his winter's stack of cordwood, and put up hay and grow oats to feed his working team. Moreover, if all is not done when the snow falls, man and animals must freeze. For a city clerk, it was something of an undertaking.

The second-class car for which he steered was but thinly occupied; nobody used the zinc wash-basins, and the towels were not remarkably wet. Alan put on the clothes he had carried, and then going to the platform behind the car, sat down on the step and lighted his pipe.

Half closing his eyes, because cinders beat the roof and dust leaped about the wheels, he looked back along the wavy line and tried to recapture his journey West. When they left Ottawa, the cars plunged into a wilderness. About every thirty miles the Pacific express stopped at a water tank, and at some spots a short street, bordered by plank sidewalks and small frame houses, ran back into the pines. Then all he saw was rocks and woods and angry rivers, a few log shacks by the water tanks, and where the line curved about Lake Superior, one or two rude steamboat wharves.

At Fort William, by the lake's head, tall grain elevators loomed in the dark, and tangled forests brooded round the quiet streets by the station. The next evening they were at Winnipeg, and for two or three hours Alan loafed about the dreary town. Winnipeg was not new, and he had thought to find the fur-traders' outpost picturesque. He saw a mean wooden station and clapboard sheds where emigrants were allowed to camp. When one left the station, one passed a row of Jew peddlers' shacks, with old skin coats and cheap overalls blocking the doors. Main street was torn by wheels, and high, light wagons, crusted thick by *gumbo* mud, were parked at the livery yards.

Bleak wooden hotels bordered the greasy sidewalk, and since the evening was cold, rows of tired men occupied the chairs behind the big windows. They lounged in uncouth poses, their feet on the radiator pipes. In the background, small shacks dotted the willow swale along the river bank, and at the bottom of the street the Portage trail came in. The thaw had softened the *gumbo* and to get across

was something of an exploit. Alan remarked that the citizens wore big rubber boots. In the cold spring evening, he thought the town forlorn, but behind the roofs the Ogilvie mills' dark bulk cut the sky, grain elevators clustered along the track, and he heard a big freight-train start.

Sitting on the step of the rocking car, he mused about the men who had built the road. In England, railways linked the seaports to the capital and the manufacturing towns; the Canadians flung the line across a wilderness. So far as he could see, for fifteen hundred miles all the traffic they might hope to get would not pay for locomotive coal. When the road was built the job was but begun; they must carry in settlers to grow the corn the freight trains would move. When they poured out money like water to cut the track through the Ontario rocks they had bet high, and although Alan was not an engineer, he liked their pluck. Yet his uncle had helped finance the bold experiment, and James Bryce was not altogether a reckless optimist. However, the train at length had reached the wheat belt, and he looked about.

Behind the cars, the track ran back, straight as a ruled line, to the rising sun; the plain was level, like a board. The grass was short and white, for snow had bleached the turf, and at spots where it had not yet soaked away water shone. A sky of hard blue arched the plain, and that was all.

Alan, holding on by the brass rail, looked the other way. In the far West a sooty smear stained the horizon, and the tops of two elevators pushed up from the grass like the funnels of a ship at sea. He imagined they marked the station where break-

fast would be served and a side-tracked freight train waited for the express. Then cinders beat his hat and dust blew into his eyes. Alan swore and, balancing himself awkwardly, went back through the rocking cars.

In the afternoon the train stopped, and his trunk was thrown onto the line. The telegraph and operator's office, and baggage room, were in a small clapboard shed. Across the rails, two bleak iron elevators, like castles, towered above the sidetrack and dwarfed the rude shiplap hotel. Next to the hotel and livery stable was a small store with a square false front that hid the low roof. On the other side seven or eight very small frame houses bordered the street. At the end of the row meat cans and broken pails sparkled in a clump of willows.

The settlement was not attractive, but Alan sensed a bracing freshness in the wind, and when he turned his head he saw the plain was no longer flat and its bleached silver-grey was checkered by soft green. The ground rolled in gentle waves, crested in the distance by vague blue, poplar bluffs. Three or four miles off, a valley, flooded, as it were, by sunshine, curved to the southwest. It opened like a gate in the wilderness and he hoped the valley trail was his.

A man led an impatient team across the rails, and Alan saw the high light wagon was clean and the thin American harness shone. The horses, for all their rough coats, were first-class animals. The teamster was tall and strongly built, but thin. His clothes were brown overalls, and a soft plug hat flapped about his brown face. Stopping near Alan, he said:

"Mr. Hale?"

"I am Hale," said Alan. "You, I suppose, are Keith Grier, and your meeting me was kind; but I don't see how you knew when I'd arrive."

Keith gave him a large, muscular hand, and smiled.

"A telegram from the Banker fixed your train and stated you would bring a trunk. A neighbor's hired man brought the message, and when I saw the locomotive smoke I harnessed up."

"Yes," said Alan, "the Banker is like that! I hope you don't mind his dumping me on your farm. My aunt imagined you might not, but the plan was James Bryce's, and my part was to pack my trunk."

"Sure," said Keith. "Anyhow, the farm is his, and I need some help. But I'd like to make home by dark, and I expect you don't want to stop."

Alan glanced at the forlorn settlement. Two men in dusty overalls leaned against the rails on the hotel veranda; another occupied a box at the livery stable door. The operator was in his cabin, and the train had melted in a cloud of sooty smoke.

"I'd much sooner push off," he said.

They put his trunk on board and he climbed the wheel. Keith gave him a bag stuffed with hay to cover the spring-seat, and started his team. Near the track, the chocolate-brown trail was torn, and trampled by horses' feet, but about a mile off it forked, and one fork went down the valley. In the warm sunshine the hollow was luminous silver-grey, and farther back, small blue woods dotted its gentle slopes. In the distance water shone like a looking-glass. After the bleak plain, its serene beauty called, and somehow the track and the elevators at the set-

tlement stood for the bondage from which he had escaped. In front was spaciousness and freedom, and he hoped Keith would take the valley trail. At the forks the other's hand moved on the crossed reins.

"We go southwest by the *coulée*, and follow the creek," he said.

## V

### KEITH GRIER

THE horses' feet beat a soothing rhythm, wheels rattled, and clevis and trace-link jingled musically. The wagon was a Clover-leaf farm wagon, but the team was fast, and the light harness was the best one could buy. Alan imagined James Bryce did not use second-class tools, and he studied his companion.

Where the trail was broken Keith's touch on the reins was firm, but he steered his team without visible effort, and swung easily on the spring-seat, his movements synchronizing with the jolts. Alan's did not, and his bones began to ache. Keith was tall and strong, and for all his humorous twinkle, quiet. Calm was perhaps not the word, for one sensed measured force, and nothing indicated that he was dull. Alan did not think him a man whom small jealousy would move, and that was something. He admitted he did not want Keith Grier for his antagonist.

In front, the valley got wider; the sun was low and colors deepened. Thin clouds, touched by orange, floated near the plain's sharp edge. Alan noted that the edge was sharp; at sunset in Canada a distant landscape does not melt. Above the clouds the sky was green. The opening plain reflected yellow light, but the bluffs that dotted it were purple-



blue, and at one spot a lake sparkled. For the most part, the lines were horizontal, and struck a note of brooding, spacious calm. The strange thing was, the throb of horses' feet did not jar. The team went fast, and Alan felt a glorious freshness in the wind that touched his skin.

"I believe I am going to like the plains," he said. "The Old Country's cut up by walls and hedges, and every little field is somebody's. Unless you ride with a famous hunt and pay for the freedom, you must keep the roads. In some other ways, our folk are like that; they do not encourage you to be independent. Here you feel you might drive on for ever. But how far can you go?"

Keith looked up with a slow smile.

"You are thicker on the ground, but the rule's the same. We must buy our freedom, although where you pay in money, we pay by strain and sweat. To begin with, you must feed your horse, and hauling hay four or five miles is some job. Then you want a stable, and nobody is going to build it for you. However, I guess you might shove ahead over the *couteau* in Dakota and come near the Missouri before you stopped for a fence. The old French explorers' road, two hundred years since! They wanted a line to Louisiana, where tide-water does not freeze, and hoped to squeeze out the Virginians, while they came down by Lake Champlain on the New Englanders. America at one time was pretty nearly French. But you were at an English University."

Alan laughed. "When I was younger I knew something about Carthaginian colonies: we did not bother much about ours. At the University I studied

footer and rowing. Not I have got to study farming, I hope you are an easy boss. Since James Bryce is my employer, I expect I must earn my pay."

"The Banker," Keith said quietly, "is a big man. I don't know why he bought Fairmead, but I think he sees the Territories fill up, and where Canada advances he likes to be in front. All the same, his farming is a business proposition, and every man and every horse must earn his keep and a profit for the boss. If he does not, he quits."

"You are a grimly practical lot. I engaged to stop, and in the circumstances, I suppose the proper plan is, as soon as possible, to learn my job."

"So long as you are willing, the Banker will not hustle you, and the farm will stand for all your training costs," Keith remarked, and indicated the sunset. "Something like color; blue on pale gold, and, farther up, red against melting green! The transparency's baffling; line won't carry you far enough, and the best color's thick. Well, I've seen some pretty good pictures in which the background is flat."

Alan was not an artist, but he thought the other's remark accurate. In the Canadian sunset the receding picture, so to speak, had not a back. It went on, and behind the farthest point one saw, one knew there was something else.

"Do you paint?" he asked.

"I can't draw," said Keith. "Sometimes I try. My last effort was a poplar and its shadow in a sloo. After two Sundays' sweating, the d—— thing looked like a telegraph pole. One can see color, but when you handle form you have got to know the rules."

A prairie hen sprang from the grass and the horses plunged. Keith concentrated on his driving and Alan looked about. Spread in an uneven crescent, dark objects advanced across the sky and he heard broad wings fan. Then the crescent sharpened to a wedge, the light touched shining feathers, and the objects, planing down, vanished behind a rise.

"Brant geese," said Keith. "They started from the Gulf of Mexico, and I expect they're stopping for the night at the big sloo. In the morning they'll pull out for the Slave Lakes and the Arctic Sea. By and by we'll get the sandhill cranes, but in a week or two they go. The coyotes and the blasted gophers stay with us all the time."

He flicked his whip and a little animal like a squirrel plunged into a hole. A few yards off Alan saw some more, sitting half-upright, as if the team excited their tranquil curiosity.

"They are not afraid," he said.

Keith laughed. "The antelope have almost vanished, and the prairie chicken begin to be scarce, but the gopher is a friendly brute. I think he multiplies where we plow, and he has learned to feed on wheat. You'll find three gophers by a trail for one you find in the grass. Looks as if Nature invented plagues to follow man. The thistle, for instance. The oldtimers didn't know it, and for some years I never saw the plant, but where cultivation spreads the pest springs up. We did not import the seed, and so far as I know, this thistle is peculiar to the plains and was not here when the farmers arrived. Now when the wind is fresh, it rolls, uprooted,

across the grass, and if it comes to anchor in your fallow, you get a noble crop."

He looked up. A drumming staccato beat pierced the evening calm, and a horseman cut the sunset. His figure was black against yellow light, and Alan remarked its sharp lines and the splendid horse's stride. The fellow advanced fast, and when he was fifty yards off lifted his hand in a graceful and rather perfunctory salute. Keith slightly turned his head and moved his whip.

Alan saw the man was young and, like his horse, was somehow thoroughbred. In fact, he thought he knew the type, although on the Canadian plain it was perhaps exotic. The fellow's skin was brown, his face was firmly and rather attractively modeled, and when he saluted Keith his straight glance was ironically polite. Something of a blood, Alan thought, remarking the other's fringed white buckskin jacket and English riding-breeches.

"Craythorne," said Keith. "One of the Jordan gang. I don't see where he's going, but so long as he doesn't bother us——"

"Who is Jordan?"

"Well," said Keith thoughtfully, "I reckon him the best of the bunch, though Branscombe's all right. I believe he was a colonel, but he's satisfied to be boss at Oulton Grange, where he aims to found an English settlement."

Alan remembered that his uncle had talked about Oulton Grange. The settlement was exclusive, but Bryce declared Jordan tried to use the wrong material, since young fellows for whom nobody in England had much use were not wanted in Canada. Alan, after studying Craythorne, imagined the set-

tlers were the sort that fails at examination for the British army and, for example, the Indian Civil Service. If so, he might at one time have claimed their caste.

"You don't approve the Oulton lot?" he said.

"Oh, well, we are different, and I guess the difference weighs. Jordan runs a pack of coyote hounds, the boys are good shots, and two or three are pretty good horsebreakers. The important thing is, they are sportsmen and we are farmers. On the plains, farming is a whole-time job."

"After all, it ought not to make you antagonists."

"That is so," Keith agreed. "However, nobody's altogether logical, and our farming on economic lines seems to annoy the boys. They think us something like *shopkeepers*; we think them blasted amateurs. Then sometimes they cut hay in sloos we claim belong to us, and chop their cordwood in our bluffs. The bluffs and sloos are, of course, the Government's, but the Oulton gang have a queer notion that they are entitled to the best there is."

Not long since, Alan himself had felt something like that. Moreover, in the Old Country gilded youth sometimes enforced its claim with a sort of careless insolence. In Canada, he thought, the plan would not work.

"I believe I understand," he said. "But if Jordan is not much of a farmer, he must be rich."

"Jordan is a pretty good farmer, and none of the bunch is rich. He takes pupils from the Old Country, a hundred pounds for twelve months, and when he settles them on the land he maybe gets something on the deal. For all that, the boys get a square deal, and their relations might do worse than trust the

man. Looks as if you had young fellows in England whom nobody wants."

"I imagine we are rather numerous," Alan agreed. "But why should not Jordan's pupils be good farmers? If Craythorne is a fair sample, they are hefty fellows."

Keith seemed to weigh the question. It was, perhaps, not important, but Alan thought the other's habit was to weigh things.

"That is so," he said. "The boys have sand; I have known them see a crop cut to rags by hail, and joke about the knock. They are sportsmen; if you like the word, they are Old Country gentlefolk. The trouble is, they expect to be given things; they feel they have a sort of *lien* on all that's good. We know we must plan and sweat for all we get, and hold it when it's won. Canada is a hard country and labor's our inheritance. Jordan's lot work for a reward; to sell their wheat entitles them to ride about after the coyote hounds and take a holiday at Montreal. We work because we cannot loaf, and when a job is finished we look for another. Canada's utilitarian, and the fellow whose business is to labor must beat the sportsman."

"In England, the tradition is to bet on the sportsman's winning."

"On the plains all start level, and sometimes the fellow who uses money he has not earned is the fellow who carries weight. However, I admit the Oulton boys have some attractive qualities that we have not. But sit tight! We are going to cross a bridge they built."

Birch and poplar branches cut the yellow sky, and

although the light was going, Alan saw the belt of trees curved sinuously across the plain. The trail vanished in the gloom behind the slender trunks, and he felt the wagon plunge down the broken curving track. Brushwood crackled, and at an awkward corner the wheels took the bank, but they got round and the horses' feet drummed hollowly on rattling logs. Keith had let his team go downhill and their speed carried them some distance up the other side. When they labored to the top he laughed.

"Jordan agreed to build the bridge, but it seems he did not agree to grade the trail, and when our crop is sown we must get to work. It will not be the first time we have finished his job."

Alan wondered whether Keith was a typical frontiersman. For the most part, he used good English, and it looked as if he was something of an artist and philosopher. All the same, since he superintended for James Bryce, he was, no doubt, a first-class farmer.

Now the trail was level the horses went fast. The valley opened to a broken plain, rolling southwest under a sky of green and red. In the distance dim bluffs topped the rises, but the light was almost gone and outlines were blurred. The plain melted in smears of subdued color. Dew touched the grass and the dust the wheels disturbed began to smell. The wind had dropped, and the cold was bracing.

By and by the trail forked and lights shone on a low smooth rise. Indistinct buildings, so to speak, emerged from the dusky background, and Alan saw a two-story house, against one end of which a lower wing was built, a barn and a long turf stable. In

the keen, calm evening, a warm smell floated about the buildings, and he noted the faint sharpness of wood-smoke and wild peppermint.

The team stopped, and a man carried in Alan's trunk and went off with the rig. Alan crossed a veranda, and followed Keith along a passage to a large kitchen where a woman was occupied at a stove. She gave him a friendly smile and a greeting in *habitant* French. The kitchen was not ceiled, one saw the roof-beams; the walls were lined with cracked, resinous matchboard, but the table in the corner was covered by a white cloth, and the thick crockery and nicked knives shone.

Somehow the room was homelike, and Alan thought his supper remarkably good, although after the Montreal boarding-house he was not fastidious. He rather liked the French-Canadian housekeeper, and he certainly liked his uncle's superintendent. In fact, he imagined he was going to be happy at Fairmead.



## VI

### SYLVIA'S PATIENT

ALAN put down the axe he rubbed. The blade was notched where he had hit a stone, but since he had not yet chopped his foot he mustn't grumble. All the same, Keith might be annoyed; the axe was a beautifully ground and modeled tool. Anyhow, he was tired, his back hurt, and the sun was hot. The birch branches in which he sat supported him restfully, and since nobody knew how he was occupied, he might take a smoke.

At Fairmead one did not stop when one was tired. One stopped when it was dark, after one had labored for about fourteen hours. As summer advanced one's jobs increased, and where Keith Grier superintended, all that ought to be done was done. The queer thing was, nobody grumbled, but it looked as if the plainsmen did not know fatigue. They were a strenuous, indomitable, and somehow a primitive lot; Alan thought them rather like the fellows about whom old Homer wrote. He, however, was a typical young Englishman of the late-Victorian age, and although he had thought himself athletic, to keep the others' speed was hard.

Lighting his pipe, he reviewed his apprenticeship. In the keen mornings he helped clean the stable and harness the teams. The horses, by contrast with the English Shires and Clydesdales, were light and clean-

legged. Where fresh soil was broken three hauled a plow, but sometimes two strong oxen turned as much ground. The big animals knew when to stop; if the plow-point touched frozen soil, they did not, like the horses, wait for the collar to jar their shoulder, and then plunge about. Keith did not use the clumsy wooden ox-bows; his harness was American, and light.

Three horses rather baffled Alan, and as a rule he drove the oxen. One had no lines and steered Buck and Bright by voice. They knew Aw and Gee, but it looked as if they knew their proper driver's intonation. To hold down the plough and slide it across the frozen spots strained one's arms and back, and when Alan loosed his team in the evening ragged furrows straggled across the field, and to carry his tired body to the homestead cost him much.

Then, as the black soil dried, the disc-harrows tore the clods, and in the long summer fallow dust blew like smoke behind the plodding teams. Then the jolting, clattering seeders drilled in the grain, and Keith gave Alan an odd man's jobs. Sometimes, for an hour or two, he was occupied at his office. All the plowing must be recorded and time-costs reckoned up. One was not stinted for money, but Keith stated that for every dollar used James Bryce expected to get back one hundred and ten cents.

In fact, at Fairmead one planned the year's work as a field-marshal might plan a campaign. Men and animals were expensive tools and must be used where their labor brought most reward. The raw material was the rich black soil and seed. Alan imagined the

Banker knew what the reward ought to be, and when the crop was reaped would study the reckoning. Perhaps it was strange, but he himself was interested.

Farming was a fresh and rather intricate game, and for all his fatigue, he had happily followed the plow and groomed and fed his team. He ate and slept like a healthy animal; his Old Country ambitions had vanished, and his exploits at Cambridge had become ridiculous. But that he did not yet know his job, he was satisfied to be a frontiersman.

Birch logs were needed, and since the others were sowing and driving the land-packers, he had after breakfast started with a team for the bluffs. Now the high, light wagon was nearly loaded, and the horses fed in the fresh grass. The afternoon was hot, and Alan, putting up his pipe, rather languidly looked about.

Blackbirds with gold and orange bars fluttered about the trees, a prairie chicken called, and a jack-rabbit went down a bank in awkward jumps, as if it was bothered by its long hind legs. Alan smelt wild mint, and where the grass rolled in the wind red lilies tossed their cups above the rippling green. Round white clouds floated across the sky, and the thin branches swayed. The trees were perhaps twenty feet high and the trunks as thick as Alan's leg. The logs were rather hacked than chopped and the fresh sap smelt.

He, however, must put up the last of his load, and he got on his feet. The logs were not remarkably heavy, but the stack was getting high, and while he awkwardly swung his axe his back had begun to

hurt. He put up two or three logs; and then, when he lifted another, he felt as if something cracked, low down in his back.

The log plunged from the wagon; Alan dropped in the grass and swore. The pain stabbed like a knife, and for a few moments he shut his eyes and clenched his fist. Then it began to go, and he knew it would not bother him much so long as he did not move. Another time, when he had perhaps trained too hard and stooped, one cold morning, to lift his boat onto a stage, the thing had knocked him down, and for three or four days had forced him to keep to his bed. For a young man to get *lumbago* was ridiculous.

Alan braced up. Fairmead was five or six miles off. Keith had wanted straight logs of a particular size, and since trees of the kind were not numerous he had searched two or three bluffs, and nobody knew where he was. Well, he must try to get on board the wagon.

He turned his head. The wagon was a hundred yards off. Although he had not heard the horses start, they were perhaps alarmed by the crash. Anyhow, the brutes were going home, and he shouted in a hoarse, savage voice. The team went faster and presently vanished behind the trees.

Alan knitted his brows. A chopped branch against which he had fallen rested his shoulders, and he had unconsciously drawn up his legs. So long as he stopped like that, his back did not hurt much. The trouble was, he might stop for a long time, and the nights were cold. In about an hour and a half the horses would reach the homestead, but until the men came back for supper nobody

might remark that he had not arrived. After supper they would begin to look for him, but the bluffs were scattered all round the neighborhood. It was awkward!

Somehow he must get home, and pulling out his knife, he cut and trimmed a thin branch. Holding onto the long stick, he got on his feet and started. For about five minutes he hobbled along, but when, helped by the stick, he lowered himself into the grass, his skin was wet by sweat and his mouth was crooked.

He set off again and kept going for ten minutes. On his next laborious stage he saw the horses had stopped by a shining sloo a quarter of a mile away. He doubted if he could get there before they went off, but he must try, and leaning on his stick, he stubbornly plowed ahead. By and by the team began to move; he saw the sparkling water drip from their mouths and ripples break about the wheels. They had drunk their fill, and would go on until they reached the stable. The reins were looped to the wagon front and in consequence would not get round their feet. Had he not been a fool, he would have tied the brutes to a tree.

For some time he labored along and rested, and at length dropped onto a bank behind a little wood. The sun was hot, the trees cut the wind, and large white wild strawberry flowers dotted the soft grass. Moreover, a broken poplar stump supported his back, and when he had got himself properly fixed, the pain for the most part went. Alan knew he was beaten. Unless somebody found him, he must stay there for the night.

A horse's feet beat the sod and he turned his head.

Five or six yards off, a girl pulled up her horse; he had not heard her sooner for the wind in the trees. She was young and rather short. Her brows were straight, and he thought they and her steady glance gave a touch of firmness to her delicately-molded face. Her hands and feet were small, but he noted that the big, chafing horse acknowledged her mistress. Her look indicated frank curiosity and perhaps surprise.

"When I crossed the little ridge by the sloo you were in front," she said. "You were going unevenly, but I did not at first see you by the trees."

"You thought I had fallen in the grass?" Alan suggested with a smile. "Well, I might state I'm sober, although, if you will excuse me, I'd sooner not get up."

The girl's glance got sharp, as if she were annoyed. Alan admitted she had not much grounds to assume his soberness.

"Sometimes an emigrant from the railroad comes south to look for work. I thought you might have lost your way and were *exhausted*. But you are not an emigrant. I believe I know who you are."

"You were kind. It is probably not important, but I am Alan Hale, one of the Fairmead lot."

The girl studied him coolly. She saw a tall and strongly-framed but rather thin young man. She had remarked his cultivated voice, and his twinkle implied that he knew she was from Oulton and the Griens were not her friends. Although his soberness was now obvious, he did not get up. The young men she knew did not, when she talked to them, loaf in the grass.

"Are the horses I saw yours?" she asked.

"I was their driver. When I was putting up a log I hurt my back, and the brutes went off."

"Oh," she said, "I am sorry! The Grange is not very far, and if we could get you there, we would send you home in a rig. I am Sylvia Dane, Colonel Jordan's niece. Do you think you could get on my horse?"

"I very much doubt. Besides, if I did get up, you would be forced to walk."

"You mustn't be ridiculous. I might ride on and send a rig for you; but the men are in the fields."

"Exactly," said Alan. "When the soil is in good order for the seed-drill one must push ahead. Anyhow, I'd sooner not hold up Colonel Jordan's sowing, and so long as I sit quietly I'm all right. When the men come home, you might perhaps send word to Fairmead."

"No," said Sylvia firmly. "You might wait for three or four hours, and sometimes the evenings are cold. If I lead the horse, he will go gently. Try if you can get up."

Alan did get up. The saddle was a woman's side-saddle, but when Sylvia took the bridle his face was white and his mouth was crooked. Moreover, since he was young, he hated to think the girl had watched him *climb* onto the horse. To be crippled by an old man's infirmity was horribly unromantic. He noted that she steered for the smoothest ground, and the animal's easy stride shook him less than he had thought.

"You are very kind, particularly since I belong to the Fairmead lot," he remarked after a time. "I wonder why you do not like us."

"Does it matter? Besides, if I admitted we did dislike you, I'd exaggerate."

"I hope that is so. All the same, there's a touch of antagonism. How d'you account for it?"

For a moment or two Sylvia pondered. She had studied Alan, and since he was an attractive young fellow and rather her type than the Fairmead type, he interested her. On the whole, she approved his frankness, and—for she had seen his mouth go tight—his humorous talk implied some pluck.

"Oh, well, I suppose neighbors sometimes dispute, and one likes to cut wood and hay at the nearest spot."

"Disputes are expensive. Neighbors ought to coöperate," Alan remarked. "However, I mustn't claim I'm an economist."

Sylvia did not know if he joked, but she was something of an aristocrat and a touch of color came to her skin. Alan rather liked her quick, proud glance.

"Where people coöperate their ambitions must agree. You think ours is to be sportsmen; we think yours commercial."

"Shabbily commercial? We are something like shopkeepers, and all we touch must pay? However, if farming does not pay, a farmer cannot for very long carry on."

"One does not like logical people," Sylvia remarked. "Sometimes one cannot answer them, but one knows they are wrong."

"Now we agree," said Alan. "I have felt like that. Perhaps you feel that if you were cleverer, you'd know their logic was not as logical as it looked?"

Sylvia laughed, and Alan thought the soft laugh



musical. Her hat, as the fashion was, was large, the old-fashioned riding-habit was molded to her slender body and, walking by the big horse, she carried herself with a queer patrician grace. The picture was attractive, but the jolting began to hurt, and when her head was turned he shifted himself awkwardly in the saddle.

"You are rather keen," she agreed.

"I am young and have been handled firmly. But you suggest that Colonel Jordan's object is not altogether utilitarian?"

"He's an Imperialist," said Sylvia, with a touch of girlish pride. "He thinks Canada ought to be British, and he is trying to settle young Englishmen in the wheat belt. Although he is not rich, I believe he does not expect a reward. He feels that healthy young men who cannot find an occupation ought not to loaf at home. They can use their strength and pluck for England on the plains."

"After all, it's a fine ambition. My uncle thinks the Northwest ought to be British, or, anyhow, British-Canadian, although the settlers he approves are not cultivated sportsmen."

Sylvia looked up with surprise.

"Then you are James Bryce's nephew?"

"The Banker is my uncle. So far, he has not much grounds to boast about our relationship. But it looks as if you were interested."

"I suppose you do not know my uncle wanted the Fairmead block. He was here first, but he was not rich, and when settlers began to arrive the price went up. Well, James Bryce bought the block, and when Oulton expanded our people were forced to be satisfied with less fertile soil."

Alan noted that Jordan was first at Oulton and waited. Perhaps he was forced to wait, but Bryce did not, and got the block. In a way, the thing was typical. Alan, however, said nothing. His back hurt worse, and until they reached the Grange he must concentrate on keeping the saddle.

The horse's smooth stride was fast, and presently where the ground rolled a seeder team cut the sky. Dust blew in long smears from the horses' feet and the wheels twinkled in the sun. Farther down the long gentle slope, another team hauled a land-packer, and one heard the iron rollers jar. In the distance, the noise was musical. The rolled soil was pink and purple-brown; the grass by its side was checkered silver and green. By and by a wooden homestead, sheltered by small trees, topped the incline. Alan saw another house, and men and teams at work in a long field. The sparkling machines were disc-harrows, and he thought the job was late.

The trail crossed the incline and when the horse stopped in front of a rather large square house Alan braced up. He had not much grounds to think Colonel Jordan would be keen to welcome him, and he did not want somebody to help him down. The horse stood quietly, the saddle was a woman's saddle, and lifting himself with some caution, he pushed off.

His back cracked, and he dropped, on one hand and his knee, in the grass. He heard Sylvia's quick step and felt her arm round his shoulder. She was stronger than he had thought, and staggering awkwardly, he went up the veranda steps, and saw a tall, thin lady at the top. Her look was not remarkably sympathetic and his face got red, but his

main object was to find a firmer support than Sylvia's arm. He felt the tight-mouthed lady would not approve his sitting down, theatrically, on the veranda boards.

"Mr. Hale is Bryce's nephew," said Sylvia, in a breathless voice. "He hurt his back and could not get home. My aunt, Mrs. Jordan!"

Mrs. Jordan signed them to advance, and Alan, carrying himself very stiffly, crossed a spacious hall to a large, shabby couch. He rather thought Sylvia helped him to get down; Mrs. Jordan certainly did not, but to get off his feet was all he wanted, and he hoped they would for a few moments leave him alone.

## VII

### THE OPTIMIST

**A**LTHOUGH the roof was low and carried by rough-sawn beams, the hall was spacious. It went across the house, and at its western end dust-motes floated in quivering yellow light. The door was fastened back and one smelt springing grass.

Alan, on the couch, looked about with languid curiosity. He noted a rosewood piano, and on the carved bookshelves' top a violin case. A pipe from the basement furnace went through the roof, but one wall was broken by a large, open fireplace. Two big moose heads occupied the stone chimney-breast, and in a glass-fronted case at one side Alan saw guns.

Antelope and black-and-white badger skins were scattered about the floor; two good water-color pictures and some old sporting prints broke the sweep of varnished matchboard wall. After utilitarian Fairmead, the pictures and piano were something fresh, and so long as Alan did not move his back did not hurt. For a few moments he studied his hosts.

Mrs. Jordan was tall and thin; her mouth was firm. Her clothes, although not new, were fashionable, and he thought the red on her pale skin was not Nature's tint. She occupied herself with some sewing, and when she looked up and met his glance she did not smile. To call her look unfriendly was

perhaps to exaggerate. Alan rather felt he was unimportant, and she hardly knew he was about.

One knew Colonel Jordan for a soldier; he carried the stamp of command. His face was lined, his hair was going white, and his English shooting clothes were old. Yet he had not his wife's baffling reserve. Alan thought him hot-blooded and perhaps generous. A man like that might be obstinate, but he would not be shabby. Jordan had come in a few moments after Alan got on the couch.

"My hired man will soon arrive, and I dare say we can make you comfortable in the rig," he said. "All the same, it might be wiser for you to stop for the night, and we have rooms we do not use."

Alan remarked that Mrs. Jordan said nothing. She did not want him for her guest, and he politely refused, on the ground that he might be forced to keep his room for some time.

"When I was knocked out before, I could not get up for two or three days," he said. "In a way, it's humiliating. The log was not large, and the other time I but helped to lift a boat from the water."

Jordan had used men, and he saw Alan's face was thin. Allowing for the pain he bore, he thought him highly strung. In fact, for a beginner, he thought the lad was trained too hard; but if he labored like the Griens, it was not remarkable.

"A boat is not a light object, unless, of course, she is a racing boat," he said. "Lumbago is suppositiously an old man's trouble, but I have known young fellows go sick with it after exposure to cold and strain. If you were a rowing man, I expect a weak back was a handicap."

"Mine got me sacked. The worst knock was, our

boat made two bumps, and I really don't think the fresh man accounted for our luck."

"She made two *bumps*! Then, you were at Cambridge?"

Alan saw Mrs. Jordan turn her head and he knew he had been rash.

"I was sent down, sir."

"Oh, well, it has happened to others," said Jordan with a faint smile. "You are James Bryce's nephew. When you resolved to emigrate, he sent you to Fairmead?"

"For six or seven months I was at a Montreal hardware store. I sold nails and skates and weighed bar iron. Sometimes I helped the clerks."

Jordan nodded. The lad was raw, but he refused to pretend, and Jordan approved his frankness. Pride perhaps had something to do with it. Alan wondered whether the old fellow were amused, but he had really wanted to enlighten Mrs. Jordan. Somehow the cold, thin-mouthed woman humiliated him.

"Fairmead is a large farm, but Grier is breaking fresh soil," Jordan resumed. "I expect you are strenuously occupied. How many teams do you use?"

For a few minutes Alan talked about Keith's plans. Jordan was a farmer and his interest was obvious.

"We know Grier's industry, but to sow the land he has broken is something of an undertaking, and although I do not want to daunt you, to harvest the crop will be a worse strain. Every man and every team must work at top pressure."

"But, of course," Alan agreed. "We have got

the men and horses. They're expensive and their cost is charged to the farm. You see, when I'm not plowing, I'm a sort of clerk. After harvest, we must make good the sum we get, with something over for the boss. But I expect all farming is like that."

"I wonder," said Jordan with a touch of dryness. "At Oulton we think ourselves lucky if, when the crop is sold, we can meet our storekeepers' bills, and sometimes we cannot."

"But, unless farming pays, there is no use in farming, sir."

"Something depends on one's object, and ours is not exclusively business-like. Here in the Northwest we have soil that grows fine milling wheat. The country is Canada's; in summer it is beautiful, and with proper houses we can bear the winter cold. So far, for the most part it is empty. It ought to support a strong-limbed, happy, British population. It might help us to develop the finest qualities in our race."

"My husband is an incurable optimist," Mrs. Jordan remarked.

"It looks as if I had started something like a platform speech," said Jordan humorously. "However, if Mr. Hale is not bored——"

Alan declared he was interested and he thought his uncle and Colonel Jordan agreed. Jordan smiled.

"Mr. Bryce is a famous banker and uses commercial rules. At Oulton I am afraid we do not. At all events, our aim is not to transplant the English industrial system in Canadian soil. I myself would sooner the plains were left for the antelope

than see them disfigured by the squalor and poverty that marks our English towns. We do not want a wage-earning population exploited by capitalists—hired men who must be always hired men, and masters who get richer. The Northwest ought to be peopled by independent British yeomen.”

“They would need servants, sir. One man cannot properly cultivate a hundred and sixty acre farm.”

“He might cultivate half,” Jordan replied.

Alan hesitated. He hated utilitarian ugliness. Life ought to be joyous, and James Bryce’s philosophy was not his, but since he arrived at Fairmead he had begun to ponder. For him to champion his competent uncle was ridiculous. Yet the old fellow was the head of the clan.

“Half cultivation does not pay,” he said.

“The argument is a shopkeeper’s argument,” Mrs. Jordan remarked.

“I was for some time a store clerk,” said Alan in an apologetic voice. “Now I’m James Bryce’s servant, but if I were given a farm and had not proper capital, I’d hesitate to start.”

“To help British agricultural laborers to independence in Canada is a fine object, but it is not mine. One must use the material one knows, and in the Old Country first-class material is being wasted. Young men from our public schools and universities cannot find an occupation. A number have not much talent or liking for commerce, the army is expensive, and I dare say some could not satisfy the examiners. Law and medicine require abilities others have not got. But I expect you know the sort?”



Alan smiled. Not long since, the sort was his sort.

"Yes, sir. Your plan is to help them use their muscles?"

"Exactly. As a rule they are athletic, a number are good horsemen and first-class shots. In the Northwest they must handle horses, and they get, for nothing, sports that in England would cost them much. Our plan is to make them yeomen farmers, to give them a field for qualities they perhaps do not yet know are theirs. All the same, we want them to be sportsmen; our aim is a spacious useful life, but a life for cultivated gentlemen, and I hope none will imagine his main business is to get rich."

"To do so would be difficult," Mrs. Jordan remarked in a feeling voice, and then looked up. "Is not that Spenser Craythorne's rig?"

Jordan went to the door. Alan's couch fronted a window, and he saw a team and wagon in the dust that rolled down the trail. In the background the plain melted to blue, and a thick yellow smear obscured the horizon. Scorched by the hot sun, the dead grass burned. After a few moments Jordan came back with a handsome, brown-skinned young fellow.

"If we cannot persuade you to stop, Craythorne will put you down at Fairmead," he said.

Alan thanked him and said he must go. Mrs. Jordan politely hoped he would soon be on his feet, but did not indicate that he might come back, and although Alan looked about he did not see Miss Dane. Craythorne helped him down the steps and, when Jordan had sent for a bundle of hay to soften

the jolting, started his team. His jacket was fringed, white buckskin, and his hat a large, looped-up Stetson. Alan knew him a good driver, and remarked that he carried himself with a sort of theatrical grace, but perhaps the fringed deerskin had something to do with it. By and by he turned his head and looked down at Alan in the bottom of the wagon.

"Your first visit to the Grange?"

"Yes. I went because I could not get home. Colonel Jordan wanted me to stay, and when I refused to send me across."

"The C.O. is a fine old fellow. Sometimes, perhaps, one feels he's grandfatherly. But how did you get there?"

"Miss Dane carried me to the homestead on her horse."

"Sylvia is pitiful," Craythorne remarked. "So long as you were hurt, she would feel she must look after you."

Alan had imagined Miss Dane was like that, but he wondered whether Craythorne wanted to imply that but for his infirmity she would have had nothing to do with him.

"Oh, well," he said, "when she arrived I was lucky, and it looks as if my accident was rather an embarrassment for two or three kind people. Yourself, for example."

"Glad to be of use! I was going near Fairmead, anyhow. But what are you doing at the farm? The Griers are not your sort."

"James Bryce is my uncle."

Craythorne chuckled. "Sorry! I didn't know.

I thought you might be a pupil and the industrious Griers had seen a fresh plan for gathering in some cash. Anyhow, since you are at Fairmead, I expect you have got to hustle."

Alan frowned. Craythorne laughed, but one sensed a sort of polite insolence. Alan, however, was on board his wagon, and admitted that the fellow drove carefully.

"Then, you do not hustle at Oulton?"

"Where we are forced I believe we can move fast. For example, when a big grass fire threatens the homestead, and when we hope to cut prairie hay before the Griers and Dalrymples mow the sloo. As a rule, however, we'd sooner hunt than plow. I imagine your friends labor because they like it."

"Unless you are rich you cannot for long play at farming."

Craythorne laughed. "If you talked in that vein to Jordan I like your pluck, particularly if Mrs. Jordan was about. Your folk are not altogether popular at the Grange."

"I imagined we were not," said Alan. "After all, however, we do not meddle with you."

"All the same, you are a drawback," said Craythorne coolly. "Your methods are not our methods, but where they are economical you force us to copy them. If you produce a first-class milling wheat, nobody will buy ours, and so forth. In fact, we don't like you for much the same reason that the Americans don't like the Japs and Chinese. You lower our comfortable standards, you don't use our rules, and you force us to buck up."

"Oh, well," said Alan, "I am not going to apolo-

gize for my relations' industry. In fact, I rather think the Northwest farmer who refuses to be industrious will soon go broke."

Craythorne smiled and concentrated on his driving, but Alan knew they were antagonists. The antagonism, however, was not altogether economical. Craythorne thought he, so to speak, refused to play for his side; he probably thought him something like a blackleg. Alan tried to persuade himself that it did not matter. He and Keith had nothing to do with the people at the Grange.

When the wagon stopped at Fairmead, Hortense Latour and a tall girl, whom Alan did not know, were on the steps, and a hired man helped him into the house and got him to bed. Then Hortense, carrying a small bottle, arrived, and stopped to talk. His team had come home, and Keith and another had gone to look for him, she said, and she had brought some liniment, with which she would rub his back. The liniment was of a marvelous excellence. Alan firmly refused, but before he could persuade her that he was resolute a minute or two went. Then she turned her head as if she listened, and Alan remembered that he had not heard Craythorne start. Mrs. Latour went to the window, but before she got there a whip cracked and wheels rattled.

"*Enfin*, he is go," she said. "That one is *beau gars*; he has the air. But what he is make in my kitchen I do not see. Now I get you the hot bottle, and I bring you supper soon."

She went off. The hot bottle was soothing, and a few minutes after he got his supper Alan was asleep.

## VIII

KATE DALRYMPLE

A WINDOW shade rattled and Alan looked up. He had not heard the door open, but a tall girl was in his room, and when she fastened the rattling shade he studied her languidly. She was strongly built but shapely, for her lines went in smooth, flowing curves. Warm lights touched her brown hair, her brown eyes sparkled, and her skin was darkened by the sun. Alan imagined she could break a range horse and perhaps steer a plow, but when she crossed the floor her step was light and her balance good.

"If you were sleeping, I'm sorry. I have brought your breakfast," she remarked.

"I'm rather glad I was awake," said Alan. "I suppose you are a second, or third cousin, or something of the sort?"

She smiled, an attractive smile. "I'm Kate D'rymple, Red Rob's niece, and we are all the Banker's kin. But let me see; my mother was——"

"I expect you had better let it go. Scottish relationships are baffling," Alan rejoined. "James Bryce is, of course, a bachelor, but it looks as if some of our ancestors were like the patriarchs. However, I don't know about getting breakfast. Do you think you could shove that rug behind the pillow?"

Kate folded the rug, and then, without embarrass-

ment, lifted him firmly and competently until the pillow supported his back. Giving him the breakfast tray, she sat down on the bed. Alan looked at the bacon and fried potatoes, and frowned.

"Hortense is a good plain cook; the plainness is a drawback. Bacon and potatoes for breakfast, dinner, and supper!"

"Sometimes you get bacon and beans," Kate remarked. "Then, at Fairmead, you take dessert."

"That is so," Alan agreed. "Sometimes you get desiccated apples, and sometimes rice and prunes. However, I'm not entitled to be epicurean, and the hash they served at the Montreal boarding-house was worse."

Kate laughed, a jolly laugh. Alan had begun to think her a jolly girl, but for a time he occupied himself with his breakfast. Then she said:

"Miss Dane helped you make the Grange?"

"Yes," said Alan, although he wondered how she knew. "She gave me her horse."

"Oh, well, I expect she saw you were hurt and couldn't walk."

Alan remembered Craythorne's remark. The fellow and Kate agreed that but for his lameness he might never have known Sylvia Dane.

"I dare say it accounted for something. Miss Dane was very kind, but it looks as if the people at Oulton are not our friends."

"They're gentlefolks," said Kate, and her eyes sparkled. "We are Northwest farmers, and the Oulton women think us hicks. In a way, we are hicks; we work like horses, and all we want is our food; bacon and potatoes for dinner and supper!"

But we do farm, and our farming pays. Their money comes from England, and, the way they guide it, it will soon be gone. All the same, they have beautiful houses and get something out of life——”

She stopped, as if she felt she had rashly let herself go. The Jordans’ and the Griers’ points of view certainly did not coincide, but, so far as Alan could see, it had nothing to do with Kate. Although the girl was stanch to her clan, he thought she, to some extent, envied the Oulton folk.

“I don’t know Miss Dane,” she resumed. “What is she like?”

“Ah,” said Alan, “to draw an attractive girl’s portrait is awkward. Miss Dane is attractive; I rather think she’s beautiful, and although she’s young, you note a sort of dignity.”

“She’s tall and cold, like Mrs. Jordan? I hate the proud *quean*. If she wasn’t there, I reckon the Colonel might be friendly.”

Alan imagined one might hate Mrs. Jordan, but he did not see Kate’s grounds for doing so.

“Not at all,” he said. “Miss Dane is small and light. Dainty, of course, is not the proper word, and perhaps delicate is worse; but you’re conscious of something about her—Hortense Latour might call it *race*. I rather think you feel Sylvia Dane is thoroughbred.”

Kate gave him a queer look and he thought she frowned. To picture an attractive girl’s charm to another was perhaps invidious; but he had felt that Kate had wanted to know. Besides, for his own artistic satisfaction, he would sooner the portrait were accurate.

"All the Oulton women do is to ride about the plains," said Kate. "They must be taken care of. You said she was dainty."

"I really think I did not. I expect Miss Dane is fastidious, but that's another thing. You know by her glance her nerve and pluck are firm. A girl who carries her head proudly is not soon daunted."

Kate smiled, but Alan saw she pondered. Anyhow, he knew he had interested her.

"Oh, well," she said. "Jordan is Keith's neighbor, but it's all Mrs. Jordan means him to be, and she is boss at the Grange. Anyhow, you are through with breakfast, and I hear Rob."

Steps echoed in the passage and Rob Grier came in. He was tall and muscular; his skin was lined and brown, his large mouth was firm, and his hair was frankly red. Although Alan thought him eight or nine years older than Keith, his step was quick and he carried himself like an athlete. Alan had noted that, in the Northwest, farmers and hired men moved with a brisk alertness that does not, for the most part, mark British agriculturalists. For one thing, however, they did not use British farming boots. Sitting down by the window, Rob gave Alan a smile.

"Do you like your nurse?" he inquired.

"I hope you will allow her to stop for some time," Alan replied. "The drawback is, so long as I have got a charming nurse I mightn't want to get well."

"She'll be here while she's needed," said Rob, and turned to Kate. "Until I'm back from the West, you will bide in this house, my lass."

Kate's face got red. She got up and fronted her uncle, and Alan saw that neither bothered because



he was about. He sensed the strain and jar of stubborn wills.

"Since when have I taken your orders, Rob?" she asked.

"Until just now, I have given none," Rob replied. "You can wait for me at Fairmead, or Keith will put you on the cars and you can go to your father at Medicine Hat. He might want to know why you joined him; but the choice is yours."

For a moment or two Kate pondered; then she laughed.

"Very well, I'll stop. Sometimes you're a fool, Rob, but I reckon you mean well."

She carried off the breakfast plates. Rob sat down and lighted his pipe.

"Kate, like the rest of us, hates to be beaten," he remarked. "Her father is a bully carpenter, and since he took a sub-contract on a railroad trestle at the Bow River she has kept house for me. Now I'm starting for the Mountain, I'd sooner she was at Keith's."

The explanation was plausible, but Alan thought it did not cover all the ground. It, however, had nothing to do with him, and he rather enviously pictured the other's excursion. Once, when the sky was luminously clear at sunset, he had seen the Mountain cut the southwest horizon like a faint blue smear, and in the wide flat country, the high ground called. The tableland was wooded, and pierced by dark ravines where one might yet find a timber wolf and the moose had not long since hid. Now the woods supposititously sheltered broken men who stole across the Missouri *couteau* from American soil.

"If I could get on a horse, I'd like to go with you," he said. "Still, I suppose it's risky? One hears queer tales. But why are they fighting in Montana?"

"Folks exaggerate," Rob remarked. "All the same, if you look for trouble, you might find some just now along the boundary. However, in virgin grass a country man's first job is pastoral; his flocks and herds wander about and feed where the grass is good and the water's sweet. On high plains open to the sun, the water's quite often alkaline. Well, in the Western United States, foothill Canada, and, I guess, Australia and Argentina, settlement by white men began like that, and the Governments gave the ranchers a long lease for all the land they could stock.

"When people get thicker on the ground, the plan is not economical. A ranching country supports a few big stockmen and their servants; where there's no cultivation, a bunch of steers might range for twenty miles over land which ought to grow twenty bushels of wheat to the acre. If you want population, you must grow cereals, and sow artificial grasses for your cattle. In consequence, a time comes when the big ranches must be broken up."

Alan nodded. Rob's remarks were logical, but the Griers were Scots, and Keith's bookcase carried shabby books by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Carlyle. Alan had thought two or three by Ruskin in rather strange company.

"Then," Rob continued, "the trouble starts. In Montana the cattle barons are a long way from Washington, and they began to think the land was theirs. Some have pretty just grievances. The free-homestead *nester* locates his 160 acres where

the soil is good and the best grass grows. Sometimes he locates beside the only water-supply, and where persuasion's no use the ranchers burn or shoot him out. Like the old barons, each commands a gang of pretty ruffianly men-at-arms. Herding cattle on open range is not a gentleman's job. But the *nesters* can shoot, cartridges are cheap, and when you lie in the grass behind a Marlin rifle, a cowboy on a horse is an easy mark. The *nester* claims the land is the nation's, his patent is stamped by the Government, and when the frontiersman pre-empt's a fertile block, he hates to quit. If the barons burn up his homestead, he drives off their cattle. Sometimes good steers are cheap along the boundary."

"But is the Federal Government at Washington willing for them to fight?"

"It looks as if they get on move, and they're concentrating U. S. cavalry at Fort Benton; but where each State is sovereign, the ground, maybe, is awkward," Rob replied, and added with a laugh: "Anyhow, we are Canadian, and a Canadian's habit is to buy where goods are cheap. Can you loan me three hundred dollars? I'd like as much as possible in American currency."

Alan agreed. As a rule, money was not much used on the plains, and where bills circulated a number were American. One paid one's storekeeper, and frequently one's hired men, after the crop was reaped, and 10 per cent. was standard interest. James Bryce's men, however, got their pay each month, and Alan told Rob where to find the key of the safe.

"Are you going into Montana?" he inquired.

"I might," said Rob, and stuffed a roll of bills

into his wallet. "My customers might be at the Mountain, and since I'm carrying a thick wad, I'm not keen to cross the frontier. When I'd loaded up all I'd got at home, I was three hundred dollars short, and the gentlemen with whom I deal have not much use for checks."

He went to the desk, and Alan said: "You needn't bother about an acknowledgment."

"You are a polite and trustful lad," Rob remarked. "For all that, I'm thinking we'll stick the bit paper on your file."

He wrote the receipt and went off. Alan noted his *I'm thinking*. Rob was born in Ontario, and for the most part his talk was typically North American, but sometimes he used an old Scots phrase.

In the afternoon Alan got out of bed, and for three or four days occupied an easy-chair on the veranda. When the men had started for the fields the house was quiet, the sun shone, and a glorious northwest wind rolled white clouds across the sky. Alan was content to loaf. Since he got to work at Fairmead the strain was hard. He had rowed and played football for his college, but, after all, at the University one was an athlete for an hour or two a day. On the plains, one strained and sweated from daybreak until dusk fell. Labor of that sort was another thing, and he began to think it implied in the laborer some useful qualities.

Sometimes he languidly studied chapters by Adam Smith and Mill. Queer books for a Pioneer's library, but they bored him less than he had thought. The old fellows patiently sought for the hidden rules that govern man's confused activities. Alan, now he, so to speak, had nothing better to do, reflected

that there perhaps were rules and civilization advanced by plan. Sometimes he turned to Carlyle and pondered the Scots prophet's doctrine of Nature's dynamic force.

Anyhow, Canada was dynamic. All went with a sort of rhythm and swing. The sunbeams scintillated, the birch branches tossed, and the prairie grass rippled, like running water, in the wind. Dust blew behind the horses' feet, and in the jarring land-packer's wake the fresh wheat sprang. One felt one was going somewhere; perhaps faster than one knew.

For the most part, however, he smoked and, when she was not occupied, talked to Kate. He liked Kate. Although strongly built, she was graceful and moved lightly. She was perhaps naïve and Alan thought her temper hot, but she was not at all a fool. When he was in his canvas chair one afternoon, she looked up from her sewing.

"The boys allow you will soon be a good teamster. When Keith's taught you, are you going to take a farm?"

"I'd like to. The trouble is, I'm broke, and even the optimists who write the immigration pamphlets admit you need at least five hundred dollars."

"You might marry a girl with a bank-roll."

"I wonder," said Alan. "A bank-roll, of course, is useful, but it ought not to be the main attraction. Are you an heiress, Kate?"

"I have five hundred dollars, and then some," Kate replied. "All the same, I wasn't making a proposition."

"Exactly. I'm not rashly ambitious, and my drawbacks are obvious."

"Oh, well," said Kate, "I expect you're modest, but some girls might like you. Anyhow, suppose you did like a prairie girl who had some money, but was not quite your sort?"

Alan was interested. Sometimes Kate bantered him, but he now imagined she was not altogether humorous, and she had experimented on the same lines before. It looked as if she really wanted to find out his point of view. To see her object was another thing.

"To begin with, I hope you and Keith will by and by acknowledge me your sort," he replied with a twinkle. "However, in the supposititious case you state, something, so to speak, would depend on circumstances. You see, when one doesn't altogether know what one wants to say, to talk like a lawyer helps. Well, I suppose a man's business is to support his wife, and to use her money might be humiliating. In fact, I rather think it would be the largest obstacle."

Kate gave him a searching glance.

"You are not greedy. I expect some young fellows from the Old Country wouldn't think the dollars much of an obstacle. I guess they might weigh against what you call drawbacks."

"It's possible. I myself don't know. It looks romantic; but if I were in love, I wouldn't admit the girl I loved could have drawbacks."

"You are a fine boy, Alan," Kate remarked. "One likes trustful folk; but I reckon it's harder to love when one knows——"

She stopped, and Alan thought she brooded, but after a few moments he heard horse's feet. A young man on a range horse swung along the trail,

and when he got down Alan saw he was a rather handsome fellow.

"Hello, Jim! Aren't you land-packing?" said Kate when he came up the steps.

"We are through and I reckoned I'd take a holiday," the other replied, and glanced at Alan.

"Jim Kerr is happy to meet you," said Kate. "You knew Alan Hale was at Fairmead, Jim, and we wondered when you'd ride across."

Kerr said they had been harrowing and sowing for two or three weeks, and although he was rather awkwardly polite, Alan imagined if he was not about Jim would be happier. By and by he declared he wanted some tobacco, and seizing his stick got up. He rather thought Kate signaled, but since he did not know if she wished him to stop, and he was satisfied Jim did not, he limped off to his room.

## IX

### ROB'S PRISONER

**A**FTER a day or two Alan was able to get about with a stick, but continued effort hurt, and for the most part he was forced to rest in the sunny veranda. In the afternoon Kate carried her sewing to the steps and they engaged in careless talk. To loaf was something fresh, and since Alan visited with a college friend he had not enjoyed the society of an attractive girl.

Kate was attractive, although her type was not the type one met at an English country house. Alan liked her frank talk and gurgling laugh. He rather liked to watch her color deepen and her eyes sparkle when, as sometimes happened, they disputed. He noted that she encouraged him to talk about the Old Country; particularly about the occupations and amusements of fashionable people. For example, she ordered him to picture the day's round at a house where he had joined a shooting party—the guests' clothes, their talk, and the manner in which dinner was served.

Alan was not always able to enlighten her, and he thought her interest strange. Sometimes he sensed a note of reserve, as if she marked a limit for their friendliness, and he speculated about Jim Kerr. The young frontiersman was perhaps her lover; Alan thought Jim had looked at him queerly and was at all events resigned when he went off. Kate, how-



ever, had signaled him to stop. Alan refused to admit he was jealous, but when Kate on one or two afternoons put a man's saddle on a horse and rode across the plain he was annoyed. Moreover, she did not tell him where she went, although it did not look as if she had gone to meet Kerr. His homestead was some distance off, and Kate had started the other way.

At length, when they were on the steps one evening, a team and rig swung across a rise. Alan thought he knew the driver, but Rob had gone off alone on a horse, and he came back on board a wagon with another man.

"It's Rob, but the rig is not his," said Kate. "The fellow he has brought is a stranger."

When the wagon stopped at the homestead the men were coming back from the fields. Rob ordered his companion to get down, and Alan studied him with some surprise. The stranger was tall and muscular; his clothes were old stained overalls, but his big hat and long tight boots were expensive. A long purple mark went across his face from one temple to his jaw on the other side. The scar perhaps accounted for his sullen and rather villainous look.

Rob's look was grim. An old cartridge-belt was fastened round his waist, and the butt of a large revolver stuck out from the holster on his hip. Alan noted a round, clean-edged hole in his hat.

"You can sit there," he said, indicating the bottom step. "After we eat, we'll take another ride; and then I hope to have done with you."

"I wish to—I'd shot you, and I don't know how I missed," the other rejoined.

"For one thing, I was going for you," said Rob. "Maybe you shoot steadier when the other fellow hasn't pulled his gun!"

For a minute or two they waited, the stranger on the bottom step, his shoulders hunched. Rob leaned against a post and the horses drooped their heads. Then the hired men arrived and Rob beckoned one.

"Put the horses in the stable, Tom; I'd like a fresh span." He turned and called Latour. "Give this fellow some supper, B'tise. If he tries to quit, sick it to him. I'll be along for the team in about ten minutes."

The stranger followed the French-Canadian, and Rob went up the steps.

"Hello, Kate! Feeling pretty bright, Alan? Is Keith no' about?"

Kate said when the boys stopped Keith expected to ride across to a sloo, where he might by and by cut some hay, but she would help Hortense serve supper. Rob turned to Alan.

"You heard the waster say he tried to shoot me and was sorry he missed? Very well, if you can get on board the wagon I want you at the Grange. Jordan is a magistrate."

Alan wanted to go. He rather thought the prisoner's statement was not good evidence, but he might see Miss Dane at Oulton and he was willing to risk the jolting on the way. After a minute or two Kate called them to supper. Rob ate like a hungry animal and refused to talk.

"The wastrel and another hobo held me up, but I'll give you particulars when I'm back," he said. "I believe Jordan's folk dine at eight o'clock, and you mustn't disturb an Englishman at his dinner."

After supper he ordered the stranger to get on board the rig, and Alan sat down in a corner on a bundle of straw. Grier and his prisoner occupied opposite ends of the spring-seat, but Alan noted that Rob carried his whip slanted across his body, the thick end towards his companion. The man, however, was sullenly quiet. He swayed about with his head bent and his shoulders hunched. Where the trail went down a ravine Rob shoved the whip into a socket and used both hands on the reins.

"I reckon you have got some gall," the prisoner remarked.

"Oh, well," said Rob with grim humor, "I know your quality. The gun's on my hip, but if you think you can get it, I hope you'll try. In fact, I gave you some chances when we camped on the plain."

Alan imagined Rob did not boast; he saw him tempt the other to a rash experiment. Red Grier was a dangerous antagonist.

The sun got low, and in the east a grass fire crawled along the horizon. By and by where birches and poplars crowned a slope the Grange windows shone in the sunset. When Rob stopped in front of the house a hired man came for the team, and the group went up the veranda steps. At the top Alan saw Mrs. Jordan. He thought her pose careless; her flowing gown trailed across the board, and nothing indicated that their arrival excited her curiosity. She gave Alan a cold smile and politely hoped he was better; and then, without waiting for his reply, turned to Rob.

"I must see Colonel Jordan, ma'am."

Mrs. Jordan arched her brows haughtily, as if she were surprised.

"He will soon go to dinner, but I will find out if he can see you for a minute or two," she said in a toneless voice. "Will you come in?"

They crossed the veranda, and she called a servant, who showed them into a small room furnished like an office. The prisoner sat down and spat on the boards.

"For all her dance-house clothes and painted face, she's surely a hard-looking dame."

Rob ordered him to be quiet. Although he was obviously tired, he stood by the desk. Alan knew the Griers' pride, and imagined in Colonel Jordan's house Rob would sit down when he was invited. Alan himself leaned against the wall and hoped Jordan would soon arrive. To hear his step in the passage was some relief.

Jordan wore something like evening clothes; at all events, his shirt was white, and his short jacket was made of smooth black material. Giving Alan a friendly nod, he indicated chairs. The prisoner studied him with frank, and rather scornful, curiosity.

"I want this man sent up for trial," said Rob. "The charge is attempted murder. To hold him for the police is your business, but if you will write a warrant I'll be accountable for him until we can find Sergeant Niven."

"What is your name, birthplace, and occupation?" Jordan asked the prisoner.

"Monk; Billy Monk, ranch foreman. Anyhow, I was foreman, and Idaho's my State. I'm telling you so's you'll know I'm American and you can watch your step."

"One name's as good as another," Rob remarked.

"If a Montana sheriff got you, you'd claim to be Canadian, and I reckon your last honest job was punching cows at a Canadian-Pacific stockyard——"

Jordan stopped him. "You are the complainant and I wait for particulars."

Rob put the cartridge-belt on Jordan's desk and, breaking the revolver, pushed out a cartridge and fitted the bullet in the hole through his hat.

"There's his mark. The gun's an old Colt; you will see the barrel's foul. Three or four shots were fired. When I reloaded her I had no cleaning tools."

He stretched his legs wearily and began his tale. Sometimes he used an American colloquialism and sometimes a Scots phrase, but on the whole his English was good. Monk half-closed his eyes, as if he were bored. Jordan's look was thoughtfully alert, but Alan noted his quiet pose. Somehow one knew him for a soldier.

About nine o'clock one evening Rob rode down to a prairie creek. He had nooned at a butte southwest from the Mountain, and reckoned he was three or four miles on the Canadian side of the frontier. If Jordan had a good map, he'd maybe find the butte was marked. The evening was not yet dark, but a grass fire moved across the prairie and smoke blew about the spot. Bushes and willows grew along the creek. Rob carried a good sum in paper currency and a heavy riding quirt. At the top of the bank he looked about.

He thought a wild currant branch bent. Anyhow, something cracked, and he sent his horse ahead. For a range horse, the horse was big; he needed an animal that carried weight. Two men jumped from

the bushes and ordered him to stop. One, at all events, carried a pistol, but Rob did not stop. Thick smoke rolled across the creek, and shoving the horse along, he rode for the fellow with the gun. He saw a flash and swung his quirt. The fellow dropped like a shot cottontail, and Rob, jumping down, seized his pistol. The other man plunged into the brush, and Rob got on his horse and went after him along the other side of the creek, where the willows were short. Once or twice he fired a shot, but the smoke got thicker and dark was coming on. Rob went back. Monk was sitting in the brush. Rob thought him stunned by the knock.

"Until you seized his pistol, you had not a weapon?" Jordan remarked.

"I had a useful quirt," said Rob. "I was not looking for trouble. In Canada you must get a permit to carry a pistol."

"Yet you took the Montana trail by the Mountain! Why did you go?"

"I went to meet a customer and pay a debt. Since he wasn't where we fixed, I expect he's dead."

He turned and, with his fist clenched, gave Monk a searching glance. Monk did not look up. He slouched uncouthly in his chair, as if he were dull and tired. Jordan pondered; Alan saw his brows were knit.

"When you searched the bank you were on your horse, in comparatively open ground. The man you hunted was in thick cover, from which he could shoot," Jordan resumed.

"That is so. Looks rash, but I wanted the swine, and I durstn't tie my horse. If I lost the fellow the other might get up before I was back."

Jordan nodded. "Since you nooned at the butte and were stopped at nine o'clock, you were, at least, one hundred miles from home. How did you carry your prisoner here?"

Rob smiled, as if he savoured a grim Scottish joke.

"For thirty miles he *walked*. A cowboy likes tight boots, and when I saw he was dead lame we made a homestead where I hired a rig. For the next two nights we camped in the grass. I wouldn't say Monk was friendly, but he didn't make trouble. All that bothered me was, he could sleep and I could not."

Alan pictured the excursion. He saw the queer companions jolting on the wagon seat, and Rob drearily watching in the dew that soaked the plain at night. Well, he had imagined Rob's nerve was good! Then Jordan said:

"I do not see where Mr. Hale can support your tale. You cannot call him for a witness."

Alan narrated Monk's outbreak at Fairmead, and Jordan turned to the prisoner.

"You have heard the charge. What have you to say about it? If I send you for trial your statement may be used."

"That's all right," said Monk. "Now I am going to talk, and the first thing is, where we stopped this fool farmer Canadian law don't go. That creek is most four miles across the Montana boundary."

The frontier line is vaguely indicated by a survey post here and there, and Jordan remarked:

"We might fix the position by a map. You admit you stopped the complainant?"

"Sure we did. We were fixing camp where there

was good water, and dead wood for a fire. All we wanted was for him to light down and be neighborly. Looks as if he thought we meant to rob him, and when he went for me I pulled my gun, but he'd cut me with his quirt before I shot."

Rob turned his hat on the table.

"The hole's in front. You certainly did not shoot *after* you got my quirt across your face."

Jordan got up and took a map from a bookcase.

"The creek rises near the butte, in Canada, and crosses the frontier."

"Sure," said Monk. "We got up against this fellow on the American side."

Rob turned to Jordan scornfully. "Do you think I'm the sort to get rattled and cut down a man who meant to be polite?"

"On the whole, I do not," said Jordan. "I am, however, a magistrate, and when I send a man for trial I must have reasonable grounds to think him guilty."

"All you have got to do is to send him up. Do you not know he's guilty?"

"I think it very possible," said Jordan in a quiet voice. "For all that, my business is to carry out the law, and in British law one must prove a prisoner's guilt. In this case you cannot do so. He denied the charge, and, where there are no witnesses, one man's statement goes as far as another's. His admission that he did shoot at you rather bears out his claim that he thought himself justified to shoot."

Rob's face got red and the veins on his forehead swelled. In order to watch his prisoner, for two nights he had not slept, and he knew the risk he had run. Now Jordan's scruples had robbed him of his



revenge. Monk, slouching with insolent carelessness, looked ironically amused. He, no doubt, thought the magistrate a fool. All the same, Alan rather sympathized with Jordan; he imagined he knew the line he took would not be popular, and he probably knew a farmers' jury would convict. Yet, because he was a magistrate, he was not to be moved.

"What are you going to do about it?" Rob inquired.

"I am forced to dismiss the case," Jordan replied, and turned to Monk. "You can go. Have you some money?"

"He has fifteen dollars. I expect they're stolen," said Rob, and put down the bills.

"Very well," said Jordan, fronting Monk. "My cook will give you some food, and to sleep in a bluff will not hurt you much. You will take the shortest line to the frontier. If you stop on this side, the police will put you across."

Monk got on his feet and gave Rob a malicious grin.

"Well, I guess I'll take my gun."

"In Canada," said Jordan dryly, "the carrying of a pistol is forbidden. If, when you reach Montana, you write a claim for the pistol, it will be expressed to any United States sheriff you can persuade to countersign your letter. Now you can go!"

Monk went, and Alan imagined he knew his luck was good. Rob gave Jordan a grim look.

"I don't need a magistrate to see me out; I brought the fellow to you because I'd sooner keep the law. You let me down, and I'm not going to bother you another time. Very well. You had better warn your young men to leave our womenfolk

alone. We will not have them hanging about our homesteads when we are in the fields."

Jordan turned to him as if he were puzzled.

"Have you grounds to think somebody from Oulton has not used the proper rules?"

"My grounds are pretty good," said Rob. "I don't yet know the man, but if I spot him, he might get hurt. Your plan's to watch out. That's all. Good night, Colonel Jordan."

He touched Alan, who seized his stick, and Jordan politely went with them to the top of the steps.

## X

### WILD STRAWBERRIES

A LITTLE sparkling creek ran through the hollow, and Alan's horse went softly across the fresh grass. As a rule, the prairie creeks sluggishly curve and loop in deep ravines, but in Long Coulée the water, confined by shallow banks, was open to the sun. Green bluffs rolled down the gentle slopes, and where they nearly joined Alan stopped his horse.

For wide belts the prairie is flat and spacious like the sea. Lines melt, and only broad smears of fading color mark the distance. About Fairmead, however, the ground rolls, and dotted woods and shining pools touch the landscape with quiet, pastoral charm.

When Alan stopped his horse the charm was not a static charm, and he felt the landscape throbbed with urgent life. The tossing branches murmured like gentle surf, and down the opening coulée the grasses, rippling in the wind, were at one moment silver and the next wrinkled green. Red tiger-lilies swung their heads, and in the white clouds' swift procession one sensed rhythmic force. Then Alan saw a horse bend its head to feed and his heart beat. He knew the small white figure on a bank by the creek. When he reached the spot, Sylvia Dane looked up. Her hands were marked by red stains and a crimson smear flattened her lips' fine curve.

"May I get down?" he asked.

"If you wish, and are not very much occupied I am gathering strawberries," Sylvia replied.

"It looks like that," said Alan, and swung himself to the ground.

Sylvia turned her head, and since she pulled out a ridiculously small handkerchief, he imagined she rubbed her mouth.

"I don't know if you are polite," she said. "However, if you like, you may gather some strawberries. The prairie is not ours."

"Oh, well, I'd sooner you did not explain away your allowing me to stop. Anyhow, Long Coulée's between the frontiers, a sort of debatable land, which has some advantages."

"For example?"

Alan's mouth curved humorously. "One must use some tact, but if I meet you on the Oulton block, I feel you are Miss Dane, Colonel Jordan's niece. He certainly is your uncle, and Mrs. Jordan does not approve the Bryce-Grier clan. Although I hope you think her prejudiced, you are stanch."

"One ought to be stanch," said Sylvia, in a thoughtful voice. "But do you imply I'm another girl in the debatable land?"

"Something like that. You are light and swift and elusive. Sometimes I see you by a bluff, but when I get there you're gone. You belong to the woods and rolling grass, your name is Sylvia, and your clothes ought to be the fairies' green. I could go on for some time, but I'm afraid you'd be annoyed."

"I'd sooner you gathered strawberries," Sylvia rejoined.

Alan took the chip basket and got to work. He had rather let himself go, but he thought he did not exaggerate; Sylvia was small and light, and somehow fairylike. One sensed her fine fastidiousness and elfin grace.

Since she carried him on her horse to Oulton they had now and then met by the prairie trails. That was all, and neither had planned the meetings, but youth had called to youth and they were swiftly friends. Then they perhaps unconsciously obeyed Nature's law, that opposite attracts opposite. On the surface, it looked as if Alan's type was the type Sylvia knew at Oulton. She liked his humorous carelessness and she liked his joyous laugh; but since she was keener than he, she knew that under the surface he was harder stuff. In fact, she noted qualities he perhaps did not yet know he had. The qualities were useful, but not much cultivated at the Grange.

In the meantime he gathered strawberries. The ripe fruit was nearly as large as a second-class garden berry, and checkered the sunny bank with crimson splashes. By and by Sylvia touched him, and he dropped noiselessly in the grass. Thirty yards off, a prairie hen pushed through the tall stalks by a pool, and scraping in the gravel, called her brood. Small, downy objects, fluttering and running, followed her to the water's edge. The hen dipped her bill and lifted her head. Alan turned his, and saw a moving tenderness in Sylvia's eyes.

"The dears! She's teaching them to drink. If one could take them home!" she said in a soft, crooning voice.

The hen called on a harsh, alarmed note. The

long grass rippled, and mother and chicks were gone. A blackbird with golden wings sprang from another pool, and a gopher plunged into a hole.

"They do not trust us," said Sylvia, as if she were hurt.

"After all, they have not much reason to do so," Alan remarked. "They ought to trust you, but I expect they don't like modern clothes. If you wore your proper fairy green——"

"No," said Sylvia, "we have lost their confidence, and you must be very gentle and patient if you want to win it back. But you must be really gentle; I believe they know when you pretend. One wonders about St. Francis—I expect they trusted him because he loved them, and not because he was a saint; but if you do love people and birds and animals, I suppose you are a saint. Sometimes to love the birds is easier."

She laughed, and resumed: "One gets foolishly romantic, and at Fairmead you are a practical lot. Ought you to be gathering strawberries?"

"Keith and the boys are turning the summer fallow, and since I am the least useful, he thought I might look about for the spots where the sloo grass is longest. In a week or two we must cut prairie hay."

"And you thought you would search the debatable land?" said Sylvia, in a meaning voice.

"Yes; it's awkward," Alan agreed. "Still, you see, if we go back the other way, we touch ground that Rob and the Kerrs and Dalrymples claim. We must feed our plow teams, and two or three weeks since Keith bought some fresh horses. However, I expect there's hay enough for us and our neighbors."

"But suppose there is not enough?"

"Oh, well," said Alan with an unconscious frown, "I am James Bryce's man, and as far as possible one must play for one's side."

Sylvia let it go. She played for her side, but there was no use in disputing until one was forced.

"I expect the fresh horses were Montana horses," she remarked. "You bought them from Rob Grier? My uncle told us something about his exploit. He went alone to meet the thieves, although he carried a large sum."

"He had got some horses, for which he undertook to pay. It's possible the horses were stolen, and in the circumstances the sellers would sooner the transaction was carried out quietly. Rob's moral code is queer. He believes he's entitled to buy where goods are cheap, but he pays for the stuff he gets."

"Perhaps the queer thing was, the Americans trusted him," Sylvia remarked. "Still, I think I would trust Red Rob; somehow you feel a really fearless man does not cheat. He carried the fellow who tried to rob him a hundred miles to Oulton! One sympathizes with his annoyance when my uncle was forced to let the other go."

"Colonel Jordan's firmness was rather fine," Alan rejoined. "I expect he knew Rob might satisfy a farmers' jury, and our lot might think him unjust. For all that, his business was to see the prisoner got every chance the law allows."

"He's a dear," said Sylvia. "Nothing could force him to be shabby. Then, for an old man, he's hopeful. He believes all will go as it ought to go; I imagine he really means as he would like it to go,

and, in consequence, one need not bother very much. Your relations are not like that!"

"Not at all," said Alan, smiling. "We are Scots; our habit is to plan and calculate. But we, of course, are farmers. Your folk are sportsmen, and one does not altogether see why they emigrated."

Sylvia told him. Jordan wanted an occupation, and believed he might help extend the Empire overseas. At the end of Queen Victoria's reign, gentlemen of his sort were Imperialists. When Alan was at Oulton Jordan himself had modestly stated his ambition, but it looked as if Sylvia had somehow inherited a practical vein. In England, she said, all who were not rich must fight for the means to live, and the competitive struggle was fierce, and often shabby. Besides, one needed specialized training and abilities that were, perhaps, not common.

"That is so," Alan agreed with a twinkle. "If you have no money and not much talent, you may be forced to take a job you hate. Then, of course, if you are properly independent, you might hate any sort of job."

Sylvia remarked that a man ought not to loaf, but was justified to choose an occupation in which he could be useful. At Oulton one could for a comparatively small sum buy a farm, and enjoy the field sports and society one enjoyed at home. Three or four of the colonists were married and their wives did not grumble very much. Sylvia herself had joined her uncle because her father and mother were dead and Jordan was her trustee. She stated that her inheritance provided her with boots and clothes, and Alan imagined that was all she knew. Since she was not clever, had she stopped in England she sup-



posed she must have tried to get a nursery governess's post.

Her confidence moved Alan. She did not pretend to be important; Sylvia was thoroughbred. Well, she knew he was sent down from the University and was James Bryce's plowman and clerk of the works. She did not yet know his father was a thief. Alan knitted his brows. He doubted if Mrs. Jordan would approve his meeting her niece, and Jordan had talked about somebody's not using the proper rules.

The sunshine faded from the grass and he looked about. In the north an arch of lead-colored cloud blotted out the horizon, and he saw the ominous gloom advanced fast. Then thunder rolled across the plain, and he ran for Sylvia's horse.

"Get up!" he said, holding his hand for her foot. "I doubt if you'll be home before the storm arrives."

Sylvia glanced at the cloud and jumped for the saddle. Her clothes were thin, and she had known grass and springing wheat beaten to green pulp by a prairie storm. Moreover, her horse had felt the scourging hail.

When Alan mounted she was two hundred yards off. Her horse carried a lighter load and had better blood than his. He saw cut turf thrown behind the drumming hoofs, and for all his efforts he dropped farther back. Sylvia was going like the wind and he hoped she would steer clear of the badger holes. All the same, she could not make Oulton before the storm broke, and using his quirt, he pushed his horse along.

Where the stirrup-leathers rubbed, the animal's side got white, foam from the bridle-links splashed

in the grass, but Alan reckoned Sylvia was now three hundred yards in front. In five or six minutes, when they passed the sloo, she would swing to the east for Oulton. By and by he saw she pulled her horse. The spirited animal was going all out, but it looked as if he knew his mistress. Sylvia refused to leave her companion behind; her habit was not to think only for herself. Using his quirt, he drew level and, although he risked something, reached for her bridle.

"You can't get home!" he shouted.

"Keep away!" said Sylvia. "Do you want to throw me under my horse's feet?"

"You can't reach Oulton before the storm!" Alan gasped.

He had missed her bridle and his horse dropped back, but Sylvia turned her head. Her color was like a rose, her eyes sparkled, and she laughed, a laugh that struck a reckless note.

"Then I must steer for Fairmead. I believe I'll get there first."

The throbbing hoofs beat a furious rhythm; dust rolled about the horses and broken turf leaped up. The wind got cold and flattened Alan's overalls against his skin; Sylvia's old-fashioned riding-skirt snapped like a flag. Alan searched the plain for badger holes, and sometimes shouted in a hoarse, exultant voice. Youth and speed fired his blood, and the slender, swaying figure, still in front, called him to fierce pursuit.

All the same, when he glanced to windward he knew speed was justified. A mile or two off all was dark, and it looked as if the gloom leaped across the plain. The bluffs melted; a lake where the coulée

opened was flat and dull like lead. When they topped the rise behind the water, the Fairmead roofs dotted the slope in front, and, pierced by ragged lighting, the storm rolled down on the homestead. Its front was crossed by slanted, roaring hail; in the background sooty vapors tossed like smoke.

They got there first, but when Alan seized Sylvia's bridle stunning thunder crashed. The horses plunged and the uproar drowned his voice. He signed her to the house and, lowering his head to the thrashing hail, started for the stable. When he got back the light was nearly gone and tremendous rain beat the shiplap walls. He did not see Sylvia, but Kate waited for him at the door.

"Where is Miss Dane?" he asked.

"I don't know," said Kate. "To bring her here was a queer thing, but it has nothing to do with me."

Alan gave her a surprised glance. Kate's look was hard and her mouth went tight. He did not see why she was annoyed, but she obviously did not approve his guest. Anyhow, for her to wonder why he had brought Sylvia to the homestead was ridiculous. One felt the building strain in the savage, icy wind.

"Be a sportsman, Kate!" he said. "You are the lady of the house and must see me out!"

They found Sylvia in the kitchen, talking to Hortense by the stove. Hortense was hot and occupied, but Alan saw she smiled and nodded good-humoredly. A homestead kitchen was perhaps not Sylvia's proper background, but it did not look as if she felt herself exotic. Still, Hortense must soon get supper for the hired men, and he had lighted the stove in the living-room. The storm might last for an hour,

and since he doubted if Kate would help much, something must be done to occupy the time.

"I expect you take afternoon tea at the Grange?" he said.

Sylvia agreed, and Alan gave Hortense an apologetic glance. He felt he was rash, but Hortense Latour was a very good sort.

"Ah," she said, "the four-o'clocker *Anglais*? If I have but know before; but I fix up something." She gave Sylvia an engaging smile. "Oh, yes, *quelque chose pour ma mignonne!*"

Hail glimmered in the torn grass, and the rain roared on the roof shingles, but in the general room the stove snapped cheerfully, and after a time Hortense carried in a tray. Alan saw thick, hot biscuits soaked in melted butter, and Quebec maple syrup in a nicked jug. Since they used American drips at Fairmead and spooned the stuff from the can, Hortense had obviously tried to make a feast. She played up, but Alan felt that Kate did not.

Kate, in fact, annoyed him. She did not talk much. He thought she studied Sylvia's clothes and weighed all she said and did, but her interest was not friendly. There was the strange thing, for, as a rule, Kate was frank and kind. Since he was not her lover, she ought not to be jealous, and although the Jordans had not had much to do with the Griers, they were not enemies.

However, he must not exaggerate, and so far as he could see, Sylvia was not at all disturbed. She smiled and talked, and frankly enjoyed the good things Hortense supplied. By and by Keith arrived, and although Alan imagined afternoon tea had not been served at Fairmead before, nothing indicated

that he was surprised. He greeted Sylvia as if her habit was to visit at the farm.

The storm had driven him home, but he did not think the hail had much hurt the wheat, he said, and inquired about Colonel Jordan's crop. After a time they began to talk about pictures, and when Sylvia asked if she might see Keith's he went for two. Alan had not seen the first, and Sylvia's frank approval pleased him. Although he was not an artist, he felt the work was good; but if it was better than Sylvia had thought, nobody knew.

Keith used water-color, and the broad washes carried one back across the rolling plain to the dim red sunset. The light clouds were horizontal, level color melted in level color, and one sensed vast distance and brooding calm.

"Ah," said Sylvia, "it is the plain! One knows it's summer evening in the Northwest. But in Canada tranquillity is not the usual note."

"Canada's dynamic," Keith remarked, and put another picture in the frame.

Bent pines cut a yellow sky; it looked as if day broke angrily, and the shadowed snow was blue. In the foreground smoke and snow tossed about a black locomotive's front.

"Morning," said Sylvia. "The hard day begins and the Arctic wind shakes the pines. But that is Canadian——" She hesitated, and resumed in an apologetic voice: "You have talent, Mr. Grier."

Keith laughed. "Sometimes one can see a picture; to draw is another thing. The foreshortened freight car, for instance. For four or five hours it baffled me, and now, when perhaps the lines are

right, it's as dead as a photograph. One ought to feel it moves."

"But if you studied——"

"I think not," said Keith. "After all, a pretty good farmer is useful. I don't know about a third-class artist, and, in the circumstances, I'll stay with my proper job."

Sylvia gave him a sympathetic glance and began to talk about something else. Somehow Alan knew Keith knew her sympathy sincere. Well, perhaps Keith's resolve had cost him much, but he was a Scot, and the Scots are logical. By and by Sylvia got up. The rain had stopped, the clouds rolled back, and the evening was serene.

"I am sorry I must go. You are very kind," she said.

Alan went for her horse. She would not allow him to saddle his, and when she started he moodily climbed the steps. He dared not hope to see Sylvia at Fairmead another time. At the top, Keith leaned against the rails and lighted his pipe.

"I don't know much about young women, but Miss Dane is fine stuff," he remarked. "Jordan has some attractive qualities, and if his niece ruled at the Grange, I reckon we would not dispute. In fact, I'm rather sorry for the fellow."

"You mean, he's not running the colony on economical lines?"

"To some extent," Keith agreed. "However, Oulton's worst drawback is perhaps the type of colonist Mrs. Jordan approves. If your nerve is pretty firm, you can front cheap wheat and harvest frost, but I begin to think Jordan is up against flesh and blood."

## XI

### PRAIRIE HAY

**I**N the wheat belt artificial grasses are not sown. One cuts wild hay where the shallow sloos have dried, and on a summer morning Alan stopped his team behind a bluff three or four miles from Fairmead. Although the sun got hot, the northwest wind was fresh, and the clouds' swift shadows trailed across the rippling grass. A taller belt marked a spot where the melted snow had run and fertilized the soil.

Alan pulled off his jacket. His trousers were cotton overalls, fastened by a belt, and he pushed back his wide felt hat. He liked to feel the wind and sun on his skin, and when he stretched his arms his muscles strained against his tight blue shirt. But for a week when he hurt his back, he labored in the fields for twelve hours a day. The ambitions he had known in England were gone and he refused to look ahead. For a time, at all events, he was satisfied to drive horses and write up the account books. His work had begun to absorb him; he wanted to feel he helped the big farm's prosperity.

Moreover, he was not lonely. He liked James Bryce's relations, and Kate was a jolly pal. Then sometimes he met Sylvia. He dared not admit he loved Sylvia Dane; the thing was, of course, ridiculous, and she knew where he stood; but since she was willing to be friendly, when he saw her on the trail

he was not forced to go the other way. Yet he perhaps ought to do so. He did not see Mrs. Jordan receive him at Oulton, and if she knew he sometimes joined her niece's excursions, she certainly would not approve. Alan's pride was jarred; he began to feel a queer antagonism for the Jordan lot.

In the meantime his business was to cut prairie hay, and letting down the mower knife, he took an oil-can from the tool box. For a few minutes he was occupied, and then he looked up. Six or seven yards off, Craythorne stopped his horse. His hand, in a buckskin gauntlet, was at his hip, and looking down, he gave Alan a derisive smile.

"Sorry I did not see you a few minutes sooner," he remarked. "However, you haven't yet got to work, and you can lift the knife."

"I might. All the same, I don't see why I should."

"Oh, well," said Craythorne, as if he indulged him, "you can't mow this sloo. Our machine is on the way. I pushed ahead, in order that I might stop the driver if the grass was not ripe."

"Do you claim the hay is yours?"

"We need it," said Craythorne coolly. "If you go a mile or two farther back, you will find pretty good grass by the Long Bluff."

Alan laughed. The fellow's calmly taking it for granted that he would move was humorous.

"Since you don't claim all the plain, you perhaps feel you are generous? At Fairmead time is valuable, and I got here first."

"As a rule, where something is to be got, the Grier gang is about. However, we know your industry, and to haul your stuff an extra two miles ought not to bother you."



Alan's mouth got tight. The fellow meant to annoy him. He, no doubt, did not want to go farther for his hay, but that was not all. Alan sensed a queer, personal antagonism. Well, if Craythorne was resolved to be nasty, he must play up.

"Your reckoning on our giving you the easy sloo is rather a joke; I wonder how you justify it."

"We don't bother," said Craythorne carelessly. "Your friends are not important, and I expect a little extra labor is nothing fresh for you. So long as you stick to your farming, we are not interested; but you must not meddle with us."

The blood leaped to Alan's skin. If Craythorne knew about his meeting Sylvia, one might account for his remark, but Alan did not think he did know. All the same, his reckoning on the Griers' undertaking the extra labor fired one's blood.

"We were disputing about the hay," he said. "Do you feel you have a right to rob your neighbors?"

"Not at all," said Craythorne. "I did not dispute. I tried to warn you politely that you must move. Lift your knife and start your team. Our machine will soon arrive."

A Fairmead machine would soon arrive; when Alan set off, Keith stated that he would follow when he had finished some chores. Glancing at Craythorne, he saw his mouth curve with malignant humor. The fellow had ordered him off, as if he were his servant; for some not very obvious reason, he wanted to humiliate him. Anyhow, he was not going. He had got there first and was willing to fight for the sloo. He hated a bully, but he had inherited a vein of Scottish caution and he would

sooner the other began the fight. Saying nothing, he put the oil-can in the box.

Wheels rattled and Alan jumped back. The horses plunged and the mower rolled ahead. When he turned he saw Craythorne straighten his body, as if he had recovered after swinging out to reach the nearest horse with his quirt. For a moment Alan hesitated, and then went off after his team. The reins might entangle the horses' feet, the knife was in action, and the animals must not be allowed to career about the plain.

Dust tossed behind the mower and he heard Craythorne laugh, but he concentrated on catching the horses. After a few minutes they went slower; since the knife was in gear, they must turn the driving machinery, and although Alan got hot and breathless, he by and by seized the reins. Turning the horses, he led them back to the sloo.

Craythorne had got down, and Alan, saying nothing, advanced and with the flat back of his hand struck the other's insolently curved mouth. He had thought to get away in time to guard, but Craythorne's fist was swift, and Alan went down in the grass. He got up awkwardly. His head swam and Craythorne's face was indistinct. It looked as if the job he had undertaken was harder than he had thought, but he must not be daunted. He had undertaken to punish the scornful brute.

For a minute they circled and maneuvered. Alan took a nasty knock and gave another, but he began to see Craythorne was trying his qualities, and although he had thought he could box, he knew his master. At the gymnasium he had studied three or four old-fashioned attacks; the straight lead with

the left, the right cross-counter, and so forth. Craythorne, however, seemed to use a dozen puzzling tricks; he was swift and elusive. Alan's mouth got tight, and then the trees and plain revolved, and he went down another time.

He got up doggedly. He was wet by sweat, his head hurt, and his shirt was splashed by blood, but as long as he could stand he'd fight. There was, however, no use in his offering himself as a target for his elusive antagonist's blows, and taking the knock he risked, he grappled. Craythorne's fist beat his ribs, but his arm was cramped, and Alan held on. Labor had hardened him and he knew himself the stronger. So long as they were locked body to body, Craythorne could not use his terrible speed and skill.

They rolled in the grass, and neither bothered about the rules of the ring. All Alan knew was, the other must not get up. Craythorne had provoked him to fight, and, he began to think, had meant to knock him out for good. On the ground they were equal, and Alan was resolved to stop there as long as possible.

Somehow Craythorne got away, and for a few moments they fronted each other on their feet. Alan breathed hard and his head swam. He did not remember Craythorne's pulling off his buckskin jacket, but his shirt was torn and one saw his skin was marked. Alan knew him shaken and began to hope. He had not the brute's speed, but he could take punishment, and he might wear the other out. Anyhow, his plan was to grapple.

Lowering his head, he charged like a bull and was staggered by a knock, but did not stop. When they

collided, Craythorne hooked his leg and used his pointed knee. Alan rather thought he threw the fellow over his arched back, but for a moment he did not know where he was. Then he saw him getting up, and they maneuvered and tried to get their breath.

Craythorne kept away. He was bleeding and ragged, but he moved alertly and fast. Alan himself had had enough; in fact, had he faced a generous antagonist, he might have tried to stop the fight. Craythorne, however, was not generous; he was frankly malignant, and Alan hated the swine. At the beginning, he had not done so. At all events, until Craythorne slashed the horses, he would have been satisfied to hold the sloo. Now he was resolved he or the other must be carried off the field.

Craythorne seemed to know his mood dangerous, for he refused to close and trusted his agility. Alan knocked him back for three or four yards, but when he reached the spot Craythorne was somewhere else. Setting his mouth, he stubbornly followed him, and when the other stopped crashed in the grass. For all that, he got up, and after about a minute went down another time. His mouth was parched, and he labored for breath; but it looked as if the other got slack. If he could but hold on, he might yet seize the cunning swine.

Anyhow, Craythorne was slower, and at length Alan thought he saw his chance to close. He plunged for the other, but Craythorne's fist stopped him, and when he slackly recovered, again struck his jaw like a battering ram. Alan reeled and dropped.

A few moments went and he dully looked about. Craythorne waited, a yard or two off. He was

bleeding and his ragged shirt was torn back from his bruised skin, but his look was cruelly malignant. He probably waited because he dared not risk a grapple, but when Alan got up he would strike, although he would not allow him to get firmly on his feet. Yet Alan was going to get up.

An indistinct object jumped between them, and Craythorne was thrown back. Alan dully turned his head and saw Keith pick up Craythorne's quirt. A mower stopped and a man ran towards the group. Keith, swinging the quirt by the thin end, faced Craythorne.

"If it's much satisfaction, you have won," he said. "Now you can get on your horse and tell your man to move your machine. The hay is ours."

"Your champion said something like that. He did not make good his claim," Craythorne rejoined.

"Oh, well, I am pretty fresh, and I'll be happy to put you and your teamster off the sloo. But if you force me to put you off, you will get the sort of punishment you were going to give a beaten man."

Craythorne hesitated. Absorbed by the fight, he had not known he had an audience. Grier's voice was level, but his look was grim. The big Scot's nerve and strength were famous on the plains.

"Well?" said Keith. "Are you going to turn your machine?"

Craythorne signed his teamster and got on his horse. Keith helped Alan up and went with him to a little creek behind the trees. When Alan had bathed his battered face and chest he rolled a cigarette.

"Can you drive your team home?" Keith inquired.

"After a rest, I hope to cut some hay," Alan re-

plied. "From the Banker's point of view, I expect my indulging in a fight would not excuse my neglecting my proper task."

"You were holding the sloo for him."

"The dispute began about the sloo. I, however, felt Craythorne was glad to fight and really wanted an excuse to knock me out."

"You have not got up against him before?"

"Not at all. I'm puzzled. A sportsman fights to win, but if he does win he's content. Craythorne was not. When I was down and out I rather think he meant to see I did not fight another time. He was going to finish his job, and since I couldn't get hold of him, he might have done so."

Keith thought it possible, and for a few moments cogitated. Then he said:

"The fellow is a sample of a type a democratic plainsman has no use for. His sort learn nothing fresh and never forget. They're survivals from the days when the Old Country squire was supreme boss, and they claim a kind of feudal right to all they want. In the Northwest the claim, of course, won't go, and when they get up against us they are horribly annoyed——"

He stopped, and, giving Alan a level glance, resumed: "Have you claimed something Craythorne thinks he wants?"

Alan wondered. Suppose Craythorne knew he had joined Sylvia's excursions? Yet nothing indicated that the fellow was her lover, and she had not talked about him. Anyhow, he was not going to talk to Keith about Sylvia.

"No," he said. "Sometimes two people instinctively dislike each other; but I expect that's all."

"Oh, well, I must get to work. Take a rest, and then I guess you had better start for the home-  
stead."

Alan lay in the grass and smoked his cigarette. The sun was hot, but the wind was bracing, and by his feet the little creek splashed musically. His head ached, his mouth was cut, and his muscles were sore and strained. All the same, when he had rested he must cut some hay, and in the meantime he brooded.

He had felt Craythorne's hostility was personal, and had, after all, not very much to do with their quarrel about the hay. The queer thing was, he thought Keith agreed. Alan, however, imagined Craythorne did not know about his meeting Sylvia. From the fellow's point of view, their friendship was ridiculous. Moreover, it really was ridiculous. Alan was but the Banker's hired man. Well, before he again saw Sylvia some time must go, and to think about her was disturbing. He got up stiffly and went for his team.

## XII

### 'A PRAIRIE FESTIVAL'

SUMMER advanced triumphantly, and for a week or two the strain all at Fairmead had borne relaxed. The hay was cut and the wheat grew tall. In the hot afternoons, thunder showers cooled the thirsty soil and the crop's color was rather dark blue than green. One or two teams were occupied in the summer fallow. Nobody used fertilizers, and stable manure helped to bind the trails in the loose sand belts. After a crop or two, one rested the soil, and since straw was not valuable, one burned the knee-high stubble and plowed in the ash. A few farmers experimented with dairy cattle, but the creameries were not yet.

Kate Dalrymple remained at Fairmead. Her father was at Medicine Hat, two hundred miles off, and she was useful at the homestead. Moreover, Alan imagined she and her uncle, Red Rob, sometimes jarred, although Kate did not talk about their contentions. The Griers and Dalrymples might quarrel privately, but they showed outsiders a united and rather formidable front. Anyhow, Kate was a jolly girl, and Alan thought the homestead brighter when she was about.

When they got supper one evening, she pulled out a printed bill announcing a sports meeting at a settlement some distance off. The rodeo was not yet a



Canadian function, but there were to be trotting and jumping matches, a shooting competition, a baseball game, and so forth.

"Who is going to take me to Elphinstone?" Kate inquired.

"I am not," Keith replied. "When I am through at the fallow, I must clear up the chores. I expect the Oulton boys will carry off the prizes."

"You are willing for them to beat you?"

"Oh, yes," said Keith, smiling. "We are not ornamental drivers and I have not a fast horse. All the same, the Jordan gang can't beat us so long as we do not compete."

"They're sportsmen," said Kate rather sharply. "You might, if you liked, keep a trotting horse. In fact, we might do the things the others do. We are not poor, and you don't use out-of-date machines. Why d'you want to live like the old-time Pioneers?"

"You would sooner live like Jordan's folk?"

"I would," said Kate frankly, and her eyes sparkled. "I like a fast horse and a smart rig, and although you are satisfied with salt pork and pie for supper, I'd like to dine. In winter I'd go to Montreal for the skating rinks and toboggans."

"If Jim Kerr gets rich, he might indulge you."

Kate laughed, but a touch of color came to her skin.

"Jim is a pretty good plainsman. He can load up wheat bags and handle a three-horse team as well as another. I guess he wouldn't know how to order dinner at a Montreal restaurant."

"It's possible, Kate. I don't know if it's much of a drawback."

"You and Jim will stay where you are put for

good," Kate rejoined. "I want life, I want culture; I want things our folk are willing to go without. But there's no use in talking. Father and Rob are set, and they're as obstinate as mules. You'll take me to Elphinstone, Alan; and I hope you'll win a prize at the shooting match."

Alan agreed politely and studied the bill.

"Artificial pigeons, range twenty yards!" he said. "Clay pigeons, I suppose? Thrown up by a spring trap?"

"I expect they are five-cent tin plates," said Keith. "Since they turn on the flat, with the edge to you, to knock them down is pretty good shooting. But you are a good shot, and Kate means to go."

"You are a good teamster; I suppose it's all you want to be," Kate rejoined. "But come on, Alan. Let's fix up the trip."

Two or three days afterwards they took the trail. Alan, getting up at daybreak, had polished the harness and washed the Clover-leaf wagon; and he imagined Kate was for some time occupied with her new summer clothes. For all that, she forced him to wait, but when he helped her on board he admitted her efforts were rewarded. Kate was a good milliner and a handsome girl. Although, like most of her clan, she was solidly built, she carried herself well, and, as a rule, her frank glance was joyously alert. Yet when Alan gave her the reins he thought her critical.

"For two hours I was busy, and I doubt if you can spot a dull buckle or a dirty strap. Anyhow, I feel for you to try is not quite fair," he said. "You see, when you came down the steps I was altogether charmed."

"I'm glad you like my clothes, and the harness certainly is all right," said Kate. "But do you like doing a hired man's chores?"

Alan declared it did not bother him; and he thought his statement accurate. At the University he was fastidious; on the plains he was happy to undertake any useful labor. Sometimes, in fact, he wondered whether he was not unconsciously moving back to the frugal, strenuous life his mother's folk had lived. He, however, imagined Kate tried to break away.

"You are queer," she remarked. "If I'd gone to an Old Country college, I'd somehow have fixed it so I'd stay."

"I was not allowed to stay."

"You were a fool," Kate said frankly, and after brooding for a few moments resumed: "The team is a good team and ought to go with a smart rig. Why do we ride in a wagon? We don't have to."

"For one thing, James Bryce is economical. You can load up a wagon with cordwood or bags of wheat."

"You have said it," Kate agreed. "I reckon we are first-class farmers; the trouble is, all we want to do is to farm. The Oulton lot hunt; in winter they have concerts and dances, and the women get their clothes from Montreal. One likes their quiet voices, and they are never awkward. All they think about is not their bank-roll, and they get some joy from life. Well, our brains are as good as theirs, and we are harder, stronger folk. Why can't we be like them?"

"They probably believe we are another sort and

could not copy them, although, if we studied hard, they would perhaps admit our children might."

Kate looked up sharply, as if she were disturbed.

"Do you believe it, Alan?"

"To some extent," said Alan, who saw she wanted him to be honest. "But it is not important. In all that really matters, I begin to think the Grier-Dalrymple clan is the finer lot."

Kate said nothing, and Alan looked about. The dew had melted from the grass, the sun got hot, and dust tossed about the wheels. The trail curved along a shallow valley; in front a pond shone like a looking-glass. Blue woods cut the sharp horizon; the clouds were round and white. Here and there one yet saw glimmering buffalo bones. That was all; only the rutted trail indicated that civilized men sometimes pushed across the quiet wilderness.

By and by, however, the wheel-marks swung round an oblong of dark-green wheat and a chocolate-brown fallow. A plowman plodding in the dust that rolled behind his horses waved his hat, and Alan saw an open door and window-frames in a sunny bank. Three or four hundred yards off he passed another dug-out, behind which smoke curled languidly from a rusty stovepipe.

"All the boys have got is plastered; they had two crops hailed and frozen, but they won't quit," Kate remarked. "Keith reckons they'll win out. He calls them the Trogollydaters. I expect you know what a Trogollydater is?"

Alan nodded. He knew he must not smile.

"Yes. A man who lives in a cave."

"Ah," said Kate, "it isn't in the spelling-with-meaning book we used at school, and when I tried

the Agricultural Dictionary I couldn't get on its track. Sometimes to feel you don't know is humiliating."

Alan agreed, although he thought her resolve to find out what Troglodyte stood for was strange. She was attractive, plucky, and keenly intelligent, and perhaps that was enough, but he sensed a queer ambition to be cultivated. After all, in the Northwest cultivation did not carry one far.

Small shiplap homestead with birch-log and sod stables began to dot the rolling ground, and one was marked by a high windmill pump. The trail went round belts of wheat and fallow, and Alan saw a field of flax like a sheet of fairy blue. Then for a time the cultivation stopped, for one does not break fresh soil very near a settlement. Alan thought there was some economical reason, but he did not know.

By and by he saw Elphinstone straggle across a background of sunny green. Small poplars and willows grew behind the little frame houses and their narrow garden lots. The street was furrowed black gumbo, but the dust had leveled the holes and the plank sidewalks were high. In spring they were, no doubt, useful bridges across lakes of mud. Light wagons and a few buckboards crowded the livery yard, and the wooden hotel hummed like a beehive. Where shade touched the sidewalk brown-skinned athletic men sat upon the dusty planks, and one informed Alan that the trotting match was over, but as soon as the boys had eaten, the sports would be resumed.

Since the hotel was small, the landlord served thin steak, gold-eye fish, fried potatoes, slabs of pie,

and hot cakes soaked in syrup, in the shade of the trees. A waitress at one side of the long table supplied muddy coffee; if one wanted strong green tea, one pushed one's mug across to the girl on the other side. The poplar branches tossed in the fresh wind, and mosquitos were not remarkably numerous. A girl Kate knew joined them, and Alan, waiting for his portion, studied the diners.

He saw some women. Their clothes, although not at all fashionable, were good, and a few were young; but for the most part they were thin and their skin had not the fresh bloom one remarked in the Old Country. Moreover, their hands looked hard and muscular, like a man's hands. For six months in winter the double windows of their small houses were firmly shut, and after the snow melted some, when their domestic chores were done, helped in the fields. Yet, although they were marked by a sort of quietness, Alan thought them happy. Sometimes perhaps they were tired, but it did not look as if they were daunted. These folk were Pioneers.

The men were lean and brown and hard, but they moved with a lighter step than British field laborers. They carried themselves uprightly, their balance was good, and their glance was level. Nobody laughed much, and Alan missed the cheerful hum of talk that accompanies an English feast; the settlers' business was to get their dinner. They were not a joyous lot; when one studied them one rather noted a sort of stubborn firmness. When crops were hailed and frozen, and the mortgage could not be paid, some firmness was needed. Alan thought them the men to stay with an awkward job.

He saw Jordan and two or three more from Oul-

ton. By contrast with the others, one noted their light carelessness. Branscombe, a big and rather sober fellow, gave him a friendly nod; Craythorne looked as if he did not know Alan was about. Yet sometimes his bold glance swept the end of the table Alan and Kate occupied. In her big hat and fresh summer clothes, Kate was a charming picture, but so far as Alan could see, she was not interested.

After dinner Kate and her companion went off, and Alan started for the shooting-range. The first match was for the rifle, and he had not thought to compete, but a sports marshal lent him an old Winchester. The farmers still used the rifle. All the antelope were not gone; in spring one could hide by the sloos where the wild geese fed, and in the forest belt on the plain's northern edge one might shoot a moose. Nobody yet bothered about the game laws.

At a hundred yards, the tin-plate target, fourteen inches across, looked remarkably small, and the marshal stated that the black dot at its centre was an ace of clubs. All the same, the farmers' brown hands were steady and their eyes were keen, and soon the tin was shot to bits. When a fresh plate was put up, the marshal turned to Jordan.

"I guess the boys will beat us, but we hope you will shoot for the old guard."

Branscombe gave Jordan an English sporting Martini, and he laughed.

"My first rifle was a Snider. Now you know my date, you mustn't expect me to help you much."

He got down in the grass, and of his five shots four bullets pierced the edges of the tin. His Canadian opponent's were round the center, but when Branscombe congratulated him the crowd ap-

plauded. Alan heard somebody remark that the old man was the best of the Oulton bunch.

Then Branscombe took the Martini and Alan loaded the Winchester. The tin-plate twinkled, the black dot flickered about, and Alan saw dust leap up where his first bullet struck. Branscombe's pierced the tin.

"The reflection is puzzling," he said. "You might try a finer foresight and work a hole for your elbow in the turf."

Alan got onto the target, but that was all, and when he gave up his rifle Craythorne laughed.

"Good shooting, Bob! Fairmead is soon out."

Jordan stopped him and gave Alan a friendly smile. Alan lifted his hat. The old fellow and Branscombe were sportsmen. They, no doubt, knew about the fight at the sloo, but they knew he must play for his side. All the same, he was beaten, another time.

He joined Kate at the ring where the grass was mown for a dancing floor. Two fiddlers supplied the music and the dances were something like Scottish country dances. Alan did not know the intricate figures and he allowed Kate to steer him. Her step was light, and when he had noted the linked-note rhythm she swept him along. Kate was a first-class partner and in all she did one sensed a keen vitality. When the music stopped he gave her a breathless compliment.

"I love it," she said. "But do you think I dance like Jordan's folk?"

Alan said he did not know, but to picture anybody's dancing better than her was hard. Kate glanced across the ring, and he thought her pose got



braced. About fifty yards off, Sylvia and Mrs. Jordan watched the dancers. It did not look as if they saw Alan, and when Kate said she must find out where Jean was, he went to a store for some tobacco. When he got back Jean was by herself, and Kate and a young fellow from Oulton led an intricate figure in an old country dance.

"Stannard!" said Alan. "His farm is at the Crossing. Do you know the young man?"

"I do not," said Jean. "But for Kate, he's the best dancer in the ring. I guess that's all she wanted."

Alan wondered. He imagined Kate did not know Stannard, but it would not bother her. Sometimes Kate puzzled him.

"Oh, well," he said, "I am not good, but if you are kind and will make allowances——"

Jean put her hand on his arm, and when the musicians began a fresh tune they joined the dance.

## XIII

### TIN PIGEONS

CRAYTHORNE on a splendid horse carried off the prize for jumping, and a bell called the crowd to the range for the pigeon-shooting. But for the Oulton group, the competitors were plainmen, and Alan imagined them better shots with the rifle than the gun. One could reckon on their holding the sights in line and steadily pulling the trigger, but the game-shot's swift, instinctive aim was another thing. Moreover, when they used a gun, the gun, as a rule, was a heavy American single-barrel. He had perhaps a chance to beat the farmers; he did not know about Jordan's young men.

His gun was the cheap product of a Connecticut factory. It shot hard, but it was heavy and had not the balance of the London hand-made guns his Oulton competitors carried. In fact, when Alan saw Craythorne smile he swore. In the Old Country he had not used a factory gun; but he was now a farmer and must be content to use a farmer's tools. Then he saw Sylvia and Jordan, and behind them Kate, on the other side of the ground. It looked as if he was the Fairmead champion, and he must shoot his best.

The spring trap was manufactured by the settlement blacksmith, who demonstrated how it worked. When he pulled a line, a round tin plate went up

obliquely, sailed in a flat curve, and came obliquely down. Alan noted that when the curve was flattest all one saw was the plate's shining edge. Then the marshal rang his bell.

"You stand behind the mark, twenty yards from the trap," he said. "So long as you knock down your pigeon in the boundary, you score."

"Suppose you knock her up?" a farmer inquired.

"That's all right," said the marshal. "Since she's metal, she won't stay up. All you have got to do's to hit her good and hard. Now then, Martin and Jasper, take the stand."

A tin pigeon sped upwards, and a young farmer shot and missed. He watched the plate's parabolic flight, and when it dropped beyond the boundary he swore.

"Blast!" he said. "I sure forgot I had a double gun."

The crowd laughed, but Jasper hit his pigeon in middle flight. Since the plate was nearly horizontal and the angle sharp, the shot was awkward. Martin at his next shot leaped from the stand and blew the tin to pieces three or four yards from the trap.

"I got her this time!" he shouted.

"Now you'll get right off the range," the marshal rejoined.

Jasper failed to qualify for the next round, and Jordan and a farmer took the stand. When the plate went up he lifted and lowered his gun. He had perhaps lost his speed, but when the plate curved to the boundary he shot and knocked it down. Alan wanted the old fellow to win. His antagonist, however, was young, and where skill is nearly equal victory goes to youth.

Then the marshal called Alan and another, and fixing his eyes on the trap, he balanced his cheap gun. Since he stood behind the trap, he ought to shoot the moment the plate went up, but the barrels were heavy and the gun did not go truly to his shoulder. He saw the tin shine and threw up the gun. He did not hear the explosion and thin smoke blew across his eyes, but he knew he had missed. He ought to wait until the plate curved down, but it was going away from him, and when, for a moment, it was horizontal he risked a shot. He thought he heard a sort of ringing noise, the tin revolved and plunged into the grass. Alan broke the gun and for a few moments left the breech open.

He riddled the next plate two or three yards above the trap, and missing another with the first barrel, waited too long, and knocked it across the boundary when he pulled the left trigger. The gun shot hard, but it did not, as it ought, come up to his shoulder with the muzzle covering the target. Somebody, however, told him he had won, and sitting in the grass, he watched the others shoot. By and by Branscombe joined him.

"I expect to go down in the next round, but you ought to reach the finals," he said. "My gun might fit you. Try its balance."

Alan saw a famous maker's name engraved on the rib, and when he put up the gun the barrels went, without his conscious guidance, exactly to his mark.

"The gun is a beautiful gun," he said. "Do you mean you'd lend it me? If I do reach the finals, I expect I'll shoot against Craythorne. He's your man."

"After all, for Spenser to lose might be good for

his soul. He backed himself against the field, and if somebody knocks him out, I'll be two dollars up."

Alan imagined Branscombe knew all about the fight for the hay. His object certainly was not to win two dollars by his neighbor's defeat.

"I doubt if that accounts for your very kind offer," he replied.

Branscombe gave him a twinkling smile.

"A good workman ought to have good tools, and we do not want our champion to beat you because his are better. Anyhow, I hope you'll take the gun."

Alan wanted the gun, particularly since he imagined Sylvia might watch him shoot. Yet in a sense he shot for the farmers, and he ought to use the tools they were content to use. Besides, the factory gun was properly his; it was the best he was able to buy.

"To explain is awkward, but I think I'll stick to the gun I have got," he said.

Branscombe nodded. "I believe I see! Well, perhaps you will take a cigarette?"

The match progressed slowly, but at length only Alan and Craythorne were left, and for a few minutes Alan let himself go slack. Somehow he had from the beginning known the fellow would be his opponent. The crowd behind the ropes got thick, but he saw Sylvia and Jordan, and—he thought it typical—Kate on the other side. Then a bell rang and he seized his factory gun.

He had thought he might be nervous when he reached the final round, but when he pushed in the cartridges his touch was firm and his hand advanced steadily along the barrels. He must get hold well forward and not cramp his left arm. Craythorne

went to the stand carelessly, but when Alan studied him he saw his mouth was tight. Perhaps the fellow felt they stood for sharply contrasted schools and he must not be beaten by a workman. Well, Alan shot for the farmers and the Bryce-Grier clan.

"Hale first," said the marshal. "Your foot behind the mark. Are you ready?"

A tin plate shone and Alan's gun went up. The muzzle was on the mark; it ought to be a foot in front. The blasted gun was heavy. Well he must wait for a second or two, although the plate got farther off. Now it was thirty yards and would soon be farther, but it was curving down. He saw its foreshortened flat side, and he pulled the trigger. The plate spun, the crowd shouted, and the riddled tin was in the grass.

They got another for Craythorne, and when Alan pushed in a fresh cartridge he felt his throat was parched. To bother was not logical, but he must not be beaten by Craythorne. Somehow he knew the insolent brute hated him. Then a gun cracked, and Craythorne's plate, with the centre shot out, fell five or six yards from the trap.

Alan braced up. He could not beat a shot like that. He must think about nothing, and see nothing, but the shining tin. The trouble was, he began to feel as if somebody compressed a tight band round his head.

"Your shot," said the marshal.

A plate leaped up and Alan swung the barrels. One ought not to swing, but the muzzle was behind the plate. All he saw was puzzling reflected light; he must trust his instinctive sense of direction and he pulled the trigger. He did not hear the explosion,

but people shouted and he knew the plate was down. Craythorne turned and gave him a frowning glance.

Craythorne's gun flashed. He missed, but he knocked down his plate with the second barrel near the boundary. Alan took the stand, and for a moment looked about. He saw Kate, and thought her disturbed, but she seemed to study Craythorne, and Alan turned his head. Sylvia and Jordan were by the ropes, and she gave him a smile. It was strange, but he felt she signaled she wanted him to win. He meant to win, but he must concentrate on the trap. His mouth was parched and the band round his head got tighter.

A plate leaped up and shone like a star. He dared run no risk, and since the gun was a double-barrel, he shot and missed. Then for a few seconds he waited; he must not miss another time, and before the tin came down he would see its flat side. It was forty yards off—forty-five—and not far from the ground. He saw it full-circle, and the left barrel was choke bored. He pulled the trigger and the tin revolved and fell. A hoarse shout told him it was inside the boundary.

Alan stepped back, triumphant. Craythorne could not beat him; all his plates were down. It looked as if the other shot wildly, for although he used both barrels, his last plate dropped across the line, and breaking his smoking gun, he left the stand.

When Alan was going he saw Jordan signal, and his heart beat, for he thought Sylvia's smile acclaimed his victory. He joined them, and Jordan said:

"I liked your steadiness and felt I must congratulate you. In a way, you deserved to win."

"To do so was not easy, sir. I almost think my competitor is the better shot."

"He had the better gun," said Jordan, with a touch of dryness.

"Mine was the best I could get," Alan remarked.

Jordan's eyes twinkled. He approved the young fellow's spirit.

"I believe Branscombe wanted to lend you his, but you refused. However, I suppose I mustn't inquire about your grounds."

He took Alan's gun and tried its balance.

"A pretty good example of mechanical mass production, and although no machine can compete with the artist-workman's hand, the method supplies useful articles to many who might be forced to go without. Yet where mechanical economy is the rule, something of beauty goes."

"When we level up, you think we must level down, sir?"

"You are rather keen, my lad. Since I am old, I'm entitled to be old-fashioned. At Fairmead you use the mass production plan."

"All the same, I believe my relations are good workmen. They try to make a first-class job."

"I admit they succeed," said Jordan, and for a moment was quiet, as if he pondered. "You are a good shot, Mr. Hale, and although practice helps, I believe a good game shot must inherit steadiness, swift judgment, and concentration. The qualities are useful."

Branscombe called him, and giving Alan a friendly nod, he went off.

"Although he *is* rather old-fashioned, he's a dear," Sylvia remarked.



Alan thought she did not exaggerate. One noted Jordan's courtesy; politeness was not the proper word, but somehow one knew him entitled to command. Moreover, as, for example, when Rob carried his prisoner to Oulton, he was inflexibly just.

"Since Craythorne was the Oulton champion, Colonel Jordan was rather noble," Alan agreed. "Then I thought you were, at all events, willing for me to win, and Branscombe wanted to lend me his gun."

Sylvia gave him a baffling look. "You are modest, Mr. Hale. Spenser Craythorne is not my champion."

Alan's heart beat. Sylvia implied that she had wanted him to win, and since her habit, so to speak, was not to talk at large, he speculated about the object for her other statement. It looked as if she saw he did so, for she smiled.

"You are really not entitled to think us unfriendly. But I suppose you felt you stood for the Fairmead school."

"I dare say I was ridiculous, but when I went to the stand your man somehow indicated that he thought my factory gun a joke, and his being there was a sort of indulgence."

"In consequence, you resolved you'd show him your lot could shoot?"

"Something like that," said Alan humorously. "A raw youth's ambition, but I am youthful. Anyhow, it's not important."

"Oh, well," said Sylvia, "it does not look as if you were keen to claim your prize. But you have perhaps examined the clock?"

Alan said he had not, and Sylvia laughed.

"Then I hope you will be delighted. But I think my uncle waits. I'm rather glad you knocked out Spenser. Good-by."

She went off, and Alan, weighing her last remark, went for his prize. The nickeled clock was supported by a bed of floridly-decorated pottery, and he imagined the manufacturer had hoped the line might command the admiration of unsophisticated farmers' wives. After supper, Kate and he started for home, and by and by she indicated the box at his feet.

"I expect that's the clock. What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know," said Alan. "The sports president declared she ticked like a locomotive, and rings a bell at the time you want to get up. When he demonstrated, she refused to stop. However, I shall probably remain a bachelor, and if you would like the clock——"

Kate turned. Her eyes sparkled and her face got red.

"You would not have the d—— thing in your house?"

"I have not a house," said Alan, in an apologetic voice.

"You thought I didn't know the clock was vulgar and common? I am a prairie girl! You reckoned you could give me a thing you had no use for?"

"I did not think," said Alan. "There's the trouble. You are a jolly pal, Kate, and, in a sort of way, you are my relation. Anyhow, I am sorry, and I hope we are not going to quarrel about a blasted clock. I'll throw the thing overboard when we pass the sloo."

Kate was not revengeful and her anger went. She

looked in front and in the green sunset saw smoke float from the troglodyte's stovepipe.

"I know a better plan," she said with a laugh. "Tom Leyland hasn't got a clock, and his wife will be tickled to death. Stop your horses at their dug-out."

## XIV

### SMOKE

ALAN fixed a block of poplar squarely on its end and swung his long axe. His arms and shoulders followed the circling shaft, but his eyes were fixed on the spot where the keen blade must go. The block fell apart and he threw the halves in the wagon. He liked to split cordwood and was becoming a good shot. To hit the small *bolt* exactly where he ought and with the proper force was some satisfaction. Things like that were satisfying. For example, when he turned his plow-team at the head-land and saw the quarter-mile furrow was straight.

Putting his axe and bucksaw in the wagon, he looked about. Small black birches and poplars were strewn across the gaps in the bluff; they had chopped the trees some time since, and they must as soon as possible be sawn into bolts and split. Coal could not be got, summer was going, and before the snow fell all the cordwood must be stacked. On the plains winter is Arctic, and Alan understood improvident settlers ran a daunting risk. At Fairmead one looked in front, and he began to approve the calculated efficiency that marked all the Grier clan did. Moreover, he liked to feel the clan had adopted him; but accepted was perhaps the word, for he too sprang from Pioneer stock.

Alan pulled out his watch. Some time since, a

girl on horseback had crossed a rise a mile from the bluff, and he would have known Sylvia much farther off. She had not come back, and he knew when they got supper at the Grange. Climbing on board the wagon, he started his team. If his luck were good, he might cut Sylvia's homeward line, although he must, rather obviously, deviate from his. Yet he did not think Sylvia would be annoyed. They had not, since he knew her, planned a meeting; but when he thought about it, his luck sometimes was remarkably good—Alan was modest, and he stopped there.

For three or four weeks, the afternoon thunderstorms had stopped and fierce sunshine had scorched the plain. The grass was dry and going white; rooted deeper in the cool soil, the wheat ripened fast and the thick stalks stood stiffly in the wind. Although the days were hot, the nights got chilly, and Alan, like Keith, watched the barometer. In August, a night's frost might spoil the splendid crop.

He studied the sky. The blue was crystalline; objects in the distance were distinct, and it looked as if the horizon were very far off. The light had a sparkling quality, and Alan thought the clearness ominous. Moreover, the evening got cool, and although the crop was not his, he began to be disturbed. In the meantime, he did not see Sylvia, and if he was late for supper Kate might want to know why he had delayed. All the same, a butte a mile or two away commanded the plain and he steered for the spot.

Ripening wheat and brown fallow checkered a long flat, smoke floated about a small homestead, and a man signaled at the door. Alan turned his horses and stopped by the wheat. The stalks were

going yellow and the heads were touched by coppery red, but Alan thought them limp.

"Hello, Coleman!" he said. "Has frost got at your crop?"

The other plucked three or four ears. He was young and hard and muscular, but his look was tired. Leaning against the wagon, he gave the corn to Alan.

"Nipped," he said. "I lost last year's lot!"

Alan examined the heads. The husks were soft, as if the milky berries they covered had shrunk.

"We had no frost. Is the field ruined?"

"I might sell the stuff for some price; it certainly won't grade Number One Hard. Harvest frost sort of skips about; cuts the wheat on one block, and leaves the next alone. Well, interest is 10 per cent., and if the storekeeper wants his money back, he must carry me on."

"Your luck's bad," said Alan in a sympathetic voice. "If you'd like to take a job, I expect you could fix it with Keith."

"I'm going to the Grange for two or three months. Miss Dane is at the house with my wife. Her horse hurt his leg in a badger hole, and I was going to yoke my team when we saw your rig."

Sylvia came from the house. Since the wagon was loaded, there was no room for the spring-seat, and Alan, pulling out some cordwood, put a bag of hay in the nook.

"You needn't get down," said Sylvia. "Give me your hand."

Alan leaned over the side. A prairie wagon is high, and when Sylvia's boot touched the wheel the horses moved. Alan reached down for her waist

and felt her hand on his shoulder. The wheel turned, she swung against him, and her arm went round his neck. He lifted her strongly on board, but when he seized the reins his hands shook and the blood leaped to his skin. Sylvia laughed, a low, gurgling laugh.

"You were strong and quick," she said. "I, however, do not weigh as much as a sack of wheat."

So far as Alan could distinguish, she was not at all disturbed. The thrill he had got was not yet gone; in fact, he imagined it would not altogether go. Yet he must not be apologetic, and Sylvia had indicated the line for him to take.

"I rather think speed was useful," he replied. "I ought perhaps to have held the reins, but I really did not think the team would move."

Sylvia nodded, as if she implied that it was done with, and seemed to nestle contentedly in the nook he had made. Alan balanced on the wagon-rail. The homestead trail was plowed by wheels and the horses went slowly.

"If I drove fast, some cordwood might shake down on to you," he explained. "Anyhow, I believe Colonel Jordan does not dine for some time yet."

"Your relations *take supper*," Sylvia rejoined. "If you are not on time, the prairie rule is, you must go without."

"Oh, well, I'm clerk of the works, and since I control supplies, they durst not starve me."

"Perhaps you oughtn't to state I delayed you," Sylvia remarked in a thoughtful voice. "I suppose Miss Dalrymple is yet at the farm. I really think I tried to be friendly, but she refused. I suppose you don't know why she did refuse?"

Alan did not know, but he felt some caution was indicated. To allow Sylvia to imagine Kate jealous was unthinkable, and he did not see himself stating he was not her lover. In fact, he felt he might get awkwardly entangled.

"I expect we are rather a thrawn lot," he said carelessly. "*Thrawn* stands for something like twisted and cross-grained. Anyhow, Kate is at Fairmead because she and her uncle jar and her father is building a railroad trestle near Medicine Hat. You must make some allowance for our Scottish stubbornness."

Sylvia gave him a smile that he thought implied that she was willing to let it go, and she began to talk about something else.

"I am sorry for Mrs. Coleman. They have lost two crops, and until she married she was clerk at a Toronto store. At the Grange, where we have all we need, winter is hard; when one has not proper supplies, it must be rather terrible. Yet they mean to hold on. Perhaps they are rash, but one likes their pluck."

"As a rule, the small settler's pluck is remarkable. Still, you see, if Coleman engaged for a hired man, he and his wife must separate. Then the farm is his, and, after all, one risks much for independence."

"I think one ought. I myself would hate to be another's servant; but your relations make the independence hard."

Alan looked up. Sometimes Sylvia and he disputed; sometimes she bantered him.

"Then we do so unconsciously. It certainly is not our object."

"Stern, efficient economy has some drawbacks,



because where there's competition, the economist's neighbors must use his rules. If they refuse, the price he fixes breaks them, and since nobody likes to be broken, the economist is not popular. You see my argument?"

"For a girl's argument, it's logical," Alan agreed. "However, one famous political economist states that the worst farmers on the worst soil fix the price for corn. I don't know, but if the old fellow is accurate, the other sort ought to get rich, and all we get at Fairmead is a very modest profit."

"At Oulton we are relieved if the loss is small," said Sylvia thoughtfully. "The men, I believe, are willing to pay something for the sort of life they like, but three or four are married, and their wives are less resigned. In fact, they sometimes declare that what the Griers can do, our people ought to do. I myself think we might, if we were really keen."

"It might imply your steering the plow when you'd sooner follow the coyote hounds."

"Oh, well," said Sylvia, "none of us is very extravagant and we do not altogether loaf. To lose our wheat would be a knock. Do you think it will freeze?"

Alan saw she was anxious; he himself was disturbed. Perhaps it was strange, for they were young; but his job had begun to absorb him, and he knew Sylvia was not the sort that demands to be indulged and amused. When he studied the sky, he thought the hard blue ominous; but in the south, where Oulton was, the horizon got blurred.

"Two or three nights' frost is, I think, all you get when the wheat is ripening," he said. "Two are gone, and our crops are not hurt. Then the haze in

front looks like smoke, and where it drifts about there will not be frost."

Sylvia turned her head. A yellow cloud floated in long level belts across the plain, and she knew a large grass fire burned. Since the wind had dropped, the smoke might last for a day or two. To see it get thicker was some comfort.

She pictured the strain all had borne since the snow melted; the teams turning back the sticky soil and stopping when the plow jarred against a frozen block; and then the dust blowing across the long fields where the disc-harrows went. In the scorching summer, men and horses, tormented by sand-flies and mosquitos, had sweated to put up sloo hay. The country was a one-crop country, in which all one thought about was wheat, and the wheat got ripe. There was the reward for thought and labor, but a night's keen frost might shrivel the splendid golden heads.

In England Sylvia had fronted life carelessly. She knew something about music and she could draw, but for the most part she had occupied herself with her clothes, dances, garden-parties, and things like that. Moreover, she knew Alan was to some extent her sort; she imagined he had joyously refused to bother. Now his look was sternly sober, and when he glanced at the crystal sky his mouth went tight.

Well, in the Northwest she had begun to see that men lived by labor and women must help. Perhaps it was strange, but she was not daunted. Sylvia's pluck was good. Then, since one must work and plan, one must try and do so on useful lines. Sylvia

knew something about the Griers and Dalrymples, and she approved their competence.

She thought Alan marked by something of his relations' abilities. He was large and strong, and although not subtle, he was not at all a fool. Sylvia recognized his sincerity, and sometimes noted a queer ascetic vein. She did not mean he was Puritanical, but he was the sort a fastidious girl might trust. Then she knew she attracted him.

Sometimes she pondered. She rather feared her aunt. Mrs. Jordan had plans for her, and although Sylvia did not approve, she knew madam's plans worked. She felt she was being firmly steered where her aunt wanted her to go. Yet until the pressure was open she could not rebel. It looked as if she might need a champion, and, perhaps mechanically, she glanced at Alan.

In the meantime, the smoke rolled higher up the sky and the sunshine melted from the plain. The horizon advanced, the bluffs loomed indistinctly in soft yellow light, and one smelt burning. The horses plodded steadily ahead and Alan let the reins go slack.

"I don't know where the fire is, but it is large," he said. "The smoke will stop the frost, and I think our wheat is safe. After the strain of spring and summer, that is some relief."

Although his voice was quiet, Sylvia remarked an emotional note. She had not labored in the fields, but she sympathized.

"I expect Keith Grier and you have earned your reward," she said. "I dare say it is not important; but, after all, the crop is not yours."

"We'd have hated to see it frozen," Alan replied. "In a way, I suppose we're not logical, but we have got fine tools and material, and one likes to make a proper job. Then, you see, my mother's folk followed the plow, and perhaps the plowman strain is not run out. I rather hope it is not."

Sylvia saw he brooded. As a rule he was humorous, and his remark puzzled her.

"But your father was not a farmer. Your uncle, of course, is famous. When Keith goes, I suppose you will superintend at Fairmead?"

"I don't know," said Alan. "In the meantime, I'm James Bryce's bondsman, and something like security for a debt he's justified to claim."

For a few moments he looked straight in front, his brows knit and his pose firmly braced. The smoke was thick, the wind had dropped, and but for the horses' feet all was very quiet. He had not talked about his father, and he was perhaps ridiculous, but he felt Sylvia ought to know.

"My father was English; his folk were something of Colonel Jordan's sort. So far as I remember, he was kind and indulgent. I rather think his worst drawback was his careless extravagance, but he got entangled. Well, I don't know if you are interested."

Sylvia was keenly interested. She noted Alan's fixed look and suspected the battle he fought. He knew her sympathetic and, conquering his embarrassment, told her his tale. When he stopped he turned his head and occupied himself with the horses. Sylvia touched him gently.

"I'm sorry, but it all happened long since and it has nothing to do with you."

"I am his son. One inherits much, and, anyhow, I cannot disown the debt."

"One must be willing to pay. Yet I do not think your uncle is a pitiless creditor. James Bryce is a big man, and a big man is not wantonly cruel."

"He's entitled to be just. Sometimes I'm proud I am his relation and spring from the frugal Pioneers. Sometimes I get savage and want to rebel. However, I suppose one mustn't cheat."

"You do not cheat," said Sylvia, in a meaning voice. "Well, I think you must remain at Fairmead, but you mustn't brood. Nobody can justly make you accountable for another's fault."

Alan said nothing. Since he dared not let himself go, nothing must be said. Sylvia knew he was a thief's son, and she was sorry; but it did not look as if she shrank from him. Anyhow, she must be back for dinner, and shaking the reins, he sent the horses along.

## XV

### FIRE-GUARDS

THE night was hot, and at the end of the furrow Alan stopped his oxen. In the gloom harness rattled and he heard the clods roll back from the mold-board of a breaker-plow. Keith was at work in the furrows behind the barns, and Alan imagined Rob, who had arrived for supper, was somewhere about. There was no dew, and Alan, sitting down in the grass, lighted a cigarette. Since six o'clock in the morning he had been pretty strenuously occupied, and now it was midnight he had had enough.

Smoke floated about the plain and one smelt burning grass. Sometimes the vapor was high and thin, and on the south horizon Alan saw orange reflections and belts of yellow flame. Then a grey, aromatic wave rolled by, and for a few moments all was dark.

The fire was large, but it advanced slowly, and Alan doubted if Keith thought it dangerous, for prairie fires burn most fiercely when the grass is dead in spring. Besides, the guards the law prescribes had been plowed. Grass and weed, however, had crept about the furrows and withered in the sun. The dry tufts might help the flames to leap across, and where effort would ensure safety James Bryce's servants did not run a risk. In consequence, Keith had resolved to cut two or three fresh furrows.

After a few moments Rob arrived and felt the turned-back clods with his boot.

"A fair job! You'll make a good plowman yet."

"That's something, Rob. You came straight for me. I suppose you saw me light the match?"

"I did not. I could tell you just where Keith is; but I smelt the sulphur."

Alan laughed. The Griers liked to be accurate, and one could smell a Canadian match some distance off.

"Paterson at the store keeps English matches, put up in a neat wee box; the sort I've seen ye use when ye came out from Montreal," Rob resumed. "He tells me they do not taste the tobacco. I expect he got them for the Oulton gang."

Scottish humor is not at the first glance obvious, but Alan imagined he saw where the other led.

"English matches are expensive. Then I believe I'm not as fastidious as I was, and anyhow, my mother was a Scot."

"Ye're not remarkably dull," said Rob. "For a' that, when ye told us why ye were late for supper, I expect ye forgot that Coleman's house is not on your direct road from the bluff."

"I did not think it important," Alan rejoined.

"Well, I'm thinking Kate was interested. When ye reached the Oulton trail ye put down your passenger?"

"No," said Alan. "I carried Miss Dane to the Grange."

"Like a bold Scot! But ye maybe felt ye were an English gentleman?" said Rob with a soft laugh. "Anyway, if her aunt was there to welcome ye, I allow ye had some gall."

Alan said nothing. He did not altogether like the joke, but sometimes Rob had an object for his dry remarks.

"Miss Dane is bonnie," Rob went on. "Keith declares she's kind; but I doubt if she is happy at the Grange."

"Why do you doubt?" Alan asked in a quiet voice. "Miss Dane is Jordan's niece."

"The Colonel's not very bright, but he's an honest man and ye could trust him. Madam, his wife, is another sort. The painted besom has cruel, calculating eyes. If I was Miss Sylvia's lover, I'd saddle my best horse when the moon was dark and carry off the lass."

Alan laughed. The laugh was not altogether humorous, but Rob must not know he was moved. He imagined the exploit was the sort of exploit the other might undertake.

"To begin with, I have no grounds at all to think Miss Dane might be willing to go. Besides, Canada is modern, and the rules your folk used in Scotland are very much out of date."

"Ye might try it. She would not think the worse of ye afterwards," Rob rejoined.

"There's another obstacle. I'm James Bryce's hired man and I cannot yet support a wife."

"Ye're the Banker's nephew," Rob said meaningly. "Well, it's not my business, and, after all, a bachelor's house has some advantages. Kate's a fine lass, but when her father takes her off my hands I'll no' be sorry."

"It looks as if she would sooner stop with us," Alan remarked.

"Just that!" Rob agreed very dryly.



He turned, and Keith stopped his team two or three yards off.

"We're through," said Keith. "I don't know if the guards are needed, but the fire is pretty fierce, and we take chances where we're forced."

"Yon's Alan's plan," said Rob. "I've been trying to persuade him the other's sometimes good. But he might be forced, and for all his English caution, the lad springs from Scottish Border stock."

"Oh, shucks! You talk like Miss Bryce," said Keith. "I expect our folk were shepherds and handloom weavers, and an up-to-date Borderer's ambition is to take a Glasgow shop. Come on and help us loose the teams."

They left the big plows in the field and started for the homestead with the tired animals. Ten minutes after he stabled his oxen Alan was asleep.

In the morning a yellow haze of smoke drifted across the sun. The fire had crept east, the wind was soft, and Alan knew the frost was gone. At six o'clock he got up, polished harness, and groomed the driving horses, since he wanted to take the road before the sun got hot. Mrs. Latour needed household supplies and he must transact some business with an implement dealer at the railroad settlement.

When he went to the house Hortense carried in breakfast, but Kate was not there. Keith moved two or three agricultural machinery catalogues, and Rob said:

"When ye see Slade about the binders, ye'll stipulate that he's to send the Toronto machine. The sheaves it ties will stand until the twine is cut. Slade would sooner push another make, but their knotting gear is not very good."

Alan knew the old self-binders tied the sheaves with wire, and sometimes the twine-knotters did not work; but Rob turned, and he saw Kate come in. Her flowing summer dress was in something like the recent fashion, and she carried herself and her clothes nobly. Rob studied her with dry amusement.

"Where are ye for?" he inquired.

"I am going to the settlement. I want some stuff from the dry-goods store, and I want some shoes. Then Alan knows nothing about groceries, and I reckon Peck will unload his old, tired stock on him. Anyhow, the goods Keith brought were junk."

"Looks all right," Rob agreed. "Three quite good reasons. I reckon ye have another!"

"Sometimes you are not as dull as you are at others," Kate rejoined with a smile. "I want to go with Alan. He's polite, and one likes good manners for a change."

"So long as the politeness is Alan's. However, he's got to be busy, and ye had better ride out and take dinner with our friends at Willow Creek. Alan's team must rest, but ye could get a horse at the livery stable."

"I might," said Kate, but somehow implied that she would not. "When Alan's tired of me I can talk to May Gordon at the hotel."

After breakfast Alan brought the wagon to the steps and helped Kate on board. It looked as if she pondered Rob's remarks, for she said:

"Some men are d—— fools."

"Quite so," said Alan. "In fact, I myself——"

"So long as you know you are a fool, there's hope for you. Some don't know, and you can't persuade them; but after all, they're the easiest to deal with."

"I wonder. Anyhow, they are perhaps the most numerous. But would you like to drive?"

Kate laughed and took the reins.

"I'd like to drive this rig into a sloo where it would stop forever. After all, we are not wagon folk and the horses are pretty fast. Since you stick to the old-timers' ways, why don't you yoke up the bulls?"

Alan lighted his pipe. He knew Kate moved by vague aspirations and a sort of rebellious discontent. On the whole, he sympathized. She was young and keen and attractive, and, for a girl, life at a prairie farm perhaps was dreary. He imagined she was franker with him than with others, but she did not altogether give him her confidence. In fact, it looked as if she had marked a line up to which he might advance but must not cross, although he suspected she sometimes wondered whether he would try. For all Kate's charm, he was satisfied to stop on the safer side. By and by she gave him a humorous glance.

"When father comes back from Medicine Hat, I expect Rob will be glad. So long as you allow all he says is right, he's a pretty good sort; but when he gets properly het up I don't talk back. The queer thing is, he doesn't worry when you take me about."

"I ought to be flattered, but I don't know," Alan remarked. "Do you think me drearily sober, Kate?"

"You're safe," said Kate in a brooding voice. "I used to think you English like the Oulton boys, but I reckon you belong to our lot. One gets up against a cold streak, a sort of fire-guard round you that the sparks can't cross. All the same, there's a mad devil hidden in us, and you want to watch your step.

Fr' instance, you tried to put Spenser Craythorne out."

"I tried to hold the fort for Fairmead, but Craythorne knocked me out."

"Oh, well, we can take a dare. Rob rode for two horse-thieves, and although he had not a gun, he brought one fellow home. But the trail is pretty smooth. I'll let the team go."

Dry grass and lonely bluffs rolled back. Sometimes Kate followed the curving trail, and sometimes for a mile or two steered across the plain. The sun got hot, and now the rushing northwest winds had dropped, the level white clouds gave the spacious landscape a brooding calm. After a time, a horseman on higher ground cut the sky. The man stopped and Kate turned her head.

"Do you know him?" Alan inquired.

"One of the Oulton boys, I expect," Kate replied carelessly. "I thought it might be Jim Kerr, but he'd have signaled."

The horseman vanished and they did not see him again, but Alan remarked that Kate drove faster. When they reached the settlement she went to a dry-goods store, and Alan was for some time occupied at the implement yard. After he had transacted his business he started for their rendezvous at the grocery, and saw Kate and a young fellow on the sidewalk. Alan knew Jim Kerr, whom he had met since the other rode across to Fairmead when Alan was ill. It looked as if they disagreed. At all events, Kate seemed to be annoyed, but Alan waited. Kate knew he was about, and if she wanted him to join her she would signal. By and by Kerr went off,

rather fast, and Alan overtook Kate at the grocery, where she ordered supplies.

"After all, I think I'll ride out to Willow Creek," she said, and added, hesitatingly: "Would you like to go?"

"I don't know your friends," Alan replied. "I'll get a Montreal newspaper and loaf about at the hotel; but we must start by three o'clock."

Kate said she would be back in time, and then gave him a confidential smile.

"I had some trouble to freeze Jim Kerr off; but he knows the folk at the Creek, and if he found out where I was, he'd get a fresh horse."

"Exactly," said Alan. "You would sooner he did not find out? Well, if he inquires, I will not enlighten him."

They went to the livery stable, and Alan imagined the proprietor gave Kate his best horse and did not charge all he might have charged another. Kate was not flagrantly a coquette, but she knew and used her charm. She took the prairie trail and Alan dined, for twenty-five cents, at the hotel, and buying a Montreal *Star*, stretched his legs across two chairs in the shady veranda.

The small frame building occupied a corner lot and the roofed veranda, four or five feet above the sidewalk, fronted the railroad track. A hundred yards off, two iron grain elevators towered above the rails; then the implement yard, two or three stores, and a row of small wooden houses bordered the line. On the other side the prairie rolled back to the horizon. When a Northwest settlement begins to grow, the railroad is for some time a social

and moral boundary. Good people do not live across the track.

The afternoon was hot, and, for the most part, nobody moved about the quiet street. Alan was tired, and when a man came up the steps he was half asleep. Looking up dully, he saw Jim Kerr.

"Is Kate in the house?" Jim inquired.

Alan said he had not seen her for some time, and Jim went angrily to the door. In a minute or two he came back.

"She's not inside. Where's she gone?"

"I'm sorry I cannot enlighten you," Alan replied.

He was willing, as far as possible, to be civil, and, to some extent, he sympathized. If the young fellow were Kate's lover, he had perhaps some reason to be angry. Jim, however, studied him with frank suspicion.

"You mean you're not going to?"

"Oh, well," said Alan patiently, "if Kate had wanted you to know where she went, I expect she'd have told you. Since she did not, you ought perhaps to let it go."

"Looks as if you had framed it up with her to cut me out," Jim rejoined in a truculent voice. "All the same, Kate is going home with me, and I got a dandy rig. When I take a girl a ride I don't put her on board a wagon."

Since Kerr had driven a rig, he was not the man they had seen on the plain, and Alan wondered who the other was. Somehow he began to think Kate knew, but it had nothing to do with him.

"I want to read my newspaper, Mr. Kerr," he said.

Jim advanced threateningly and his face got red.

"D'you think I'm going to be cut out by a blasted Englishman? I've stood for all I'm going to stand from another of the gang. Where's Kate? Say it quick!"

Alan got up. Kerr's remark about another Englishman was puzzling, but he could not weigh it now. Craythorne had forced him to fight at the sloo; it began to look as if the Western farmers' habit was to fight, but he was not going to be bullied.

"I am as Canadian as you are; but if you claim to be a good sample, I mustn't boast. Anyhow, you're a nuisance. Get off the porch."

"Can you put me off?" Kerr inquired, and aimed for Alan's head.

Alan ducked and, swinging his body to the left, placed a right-hand blow. Kerr staggered, but came back, and Alan took a knock. Although he had not felt particularly savage, the knock fired his blood. Jim was not much of a boxer, but he was resolute and muscular. Alan had thought himself stronger than Craythorne, but when they fought skill had beaten weight. Well, they must not grapple, and he must use speed. He did not want an audience, and so far as one could see across the rails, nobody was in the street.

For a few moments they maneuvered, Kerr savagely following Alan, who was satisfied to get away. Then, when he fronted the low rails between the posts, the other gave him the chance for which he watched. Something must be risked, and Alan's body followed his straight left arm. For a moment his right foot was off the ground, and most of his weight was behind his fist.

His knuckles jarred, and Kerr's arms went up.

He reeled across the boards and his back struck the rail, about the level of his waist; then his legs went up and he vanished. When Alan reached the balustrade, Kerr, four or five feet below, was sitting in the dust. He looked about stupidly and rubbed the blood from his mouth.

Two or three men came from a store, and one pulled Kerr to his feet. Jim tried to push the fellow away, but another got hold of him, and the group disappeared round a corner. Alan sat down and tried to roll a cigarette. The tobacco spilled about the boards and he broke the match he pulled off the block.

After a time he went for his horses, and when Kate joined him he thought she had heard about the fight.

"If you have loaded up our stuff, we'll start," she said. "The team has got a pretty good rest, but they're not fresh, and the moon rises late."

They got on board, and when the elevators began to sink behind the grass Kate gave Alan a smile.

"I was afraid Jim might bother us. Was he hurt?"

"On the whole, I think not. I rather imagine he was surprised."

"When he doesn't get mad he's quite a nice boy," Kate remarked. "Anyhow, you made good, Alan. You're a useful fire-guard."

"I wonder," said Alan dryly. "If I thought your lovers were numerous, I'd try for another post."

For a few moments Kate seemed to brood, and Alan saw her brows knit. Then she said:

"Some folks think us sober, but we're a reckless lot. Anyhow, when we know where we want to get we don't stop for a risk. Well, you needn't keep the trail by the ponds. Shove across the rise."



## XVI

### HARVEST MOON

**S**OFT yellow light touched the wheat; the heavy ears were bronze and red, and by contrast with the strong color the oats were pale and silvery. The sky was faint blue, and the hot sunshine was not bright. In the background, scorched grass and yellow bluffs melted in the receding plain. Alan, straightening his bent back, thought the spacious landscape a harmony of gold and blue. But a few weeks since, the prairie was green, splashed by the tiger-lilies' glowing red. In the Northwest summer is short, and now Nature tranquilly prepared to rest, his work got harder.

Three binders, each hauled by three horses, advanced in echelon, along the wheat's edge; but for a narrow belt, the oats were already cut. The machines' revolving arms flashed in the sun, and bent figures labored among the sheaves that strewed their wake. One did not cut much straw, and the hard stubble reached one's knees. Alan's leggings were scratched, his bare arms were scarred, and his back hurt. Dust melted to grime on his wet skin and his mouth was parched.

His job was to drive a binder, and when the dew dried in the bracing morning he led out his team. Since the moon was full, he did not know when he would stop; but in the hot afternoon the stooking gang got slack and he had gone to help. All were

not plainsmen; the railroad ran cheap trains for harvesters, and one or two were rather obviously knocked out. Alan himself was not fresh, but he had put an exhausted English lad on his machine and imagined he could hold on until Kate arrived with tea and biscuits.

In the meantime the machines must not get far in front. The stookers' business was to seize the sheaves the binders flung back. One dragged three or four together, spread their bases with one's foot, and crossed the tops in order to lock the pile. The stook must stand firmly, but must not be compact, for sun and air must penetrate. To build a stook is not difficult. The difficulty is to build a hundred at the proper speed. The binders work fast, and one must throw the sheaves mechanically where they ought to go and pump for a fresh lot. Then, in a Canadian harvest field, one cannot stop for breath, and as a rule gets but little time for food.

Alan risked a glance across the great sweep of grain. To move the stuff before Indian summer went looked impossible, but when the first snow fell all must be thrashed and a large quantity have reached the railroad elevators. The days got shorter, and although to see the sun go down was some relief, one must work faster in the morning.

The sharp straw stabbed his sore hands and the thick stalks entangled his legs. Two men in front were tall, long-armed Dakotans, and he must keep their pace. Behind him, Latour sang a breathless French-Canadian song about a fountain the old *correurs* knew. To be led, and pushed on, by experts was hard for a tenderfoot. Yet, like him, they were

but men, and all one man did another ought to do. Alan doubted if he was logical, but he set his mouth and crashed along through the stiff, tall straw.

At length Kate and Hortense arrived, and lying with his back against a stook, he drained a can of tea. By and by Keith, eating a hot biscuit as he went, came up. At harvest nobody is fastidious, and the syrup stuck the dust and crumbs to his mouth. He pushed the stook with his boot.

"Pretty solid! I thought she'd fall down."

"I put her up," said Alan. "Would you like to try the next? We are not much behind the machine."

Keith laughed. "You'll pay for your speed in the morning; but I want you to drive. You handle the binder better than Onslow."

"The boy's done. He can't put up the sheaves."

"It's awkward. Every man we have got must pull his proper weight. Where one is slow he stops the gang."

"He's willing, and I believe he's broke. Try him out for another few days."

Keith nodded, and when he signaled the men to start Alan called Onslow from the binder.

"I'm going to drive. You can go to the workshop for a fresh spool of twine and fill up my oil-can. Wash out the can with kerosene and run a wire through the spout. In fact, so long as you are doing something useful, you need not hurry back."

The lad was thin. He had arrived three or four days since, on his feet, from the railroad, and the first few days on a Canadian farm are hard. He gave Alan a grateful look.

"Thank you, Mr. Hale. I believe I'll soon work up to the proper speed."

"Of course you will," said Alan cheerfully. "Anyhow, the homestead is some distance off, and you're not forced to go particularly fast."

He got into the iron saddle, seized the lines, and started his team. The wooden arms revolved, the knife rasped through the guards, and with a musical throb and clatter the machine rolled into the wheat. To steer three horses and cut an even swath is not altogether an easy job, but Alan could straighten his cramped back and use fresh muscles. Moreover, the air was cooling, and at sunset the heavy dew might stop the men. Anyhow, he was getting hard, his body was his servant, and to know men trained from boyhood to labor could not knock him out was some satisfaction.

He pictured the crushing fatigue he had borne at the beginning. After all, when the strain got intolerable he could for an hour or two occupy himself at the office, but Onslow and the hired men could not. Alan wondered where they went when the snow fell and work must cease.

A few might be allowed to stop and help, without pay, at farmyard chores; the rest must board at dollar-hotels in snow-bound settlements, and sternly economize their melting roll of bills. On the plains nobody could labor in the Arctic frost.

Well, the harvest was a splendid harvest. Keith reckoned to thrash twenty bushels to the acre, and sixteen bushels paid. In England one might get fifty bushels, but one must work by rotation and for a time rest the land in grass. At Fairmead one turned the summer fallow and sowed a fresh wheat crop.

In the meantime he must concentrate on his driving; the machine he followed must not get farther ahead, and along the swath he cut the wheat must stand like a straight yellow wall. The sun got low and the sky went green. Dust no longer floated about his head; he felt a cool touch on his skin and the iron levers got wet. Then the red sun sank and he smelt the soil, and sometimes peppermint. The whirring machines struck a duller note and the damp straw got limp.

At length, when the moon rose, Keith was forced to stop, but Alan, calling a man to take his horses, for some time experimented with a band roller. In the morning the machine must be ready for work, and the band was slack. When he was satisfied, the others were gone, but he stopped to pull a tarpaulin over the driving gear.

He heard a horse's feet, and when he looked about a light figure on a big horse cut the moon's large disc. Alan waited, and in a minute or two Sylvia got down.

"You cover your machines," she said. "Well, I suppose it's typical."

"The dew gets thick, and when you are James Bryce's servant you take care of good tools. Anyhow, we must account for those he supplies, and he expects me to record all we spend on repairs to implements."

"Rather like shop-keeping, is it not?" Sylvia remarked.

"I suppose that is so, Miss Dane. For part of the time I'm something like a department store manager; and I was not long since a store clerk. In Canada it's not important, and I like my job. Any-

how, I doubt if I could get another. Then, you see, the Grier lot are not gentlemen farmers."

"When you are irritable, you are unconsciously humorous, Alan."

"I am not irritable. To be irritable when you are about is absurd, particularly on a glorious evening when the harvest moon is full. All I wanted was for you to see why I refuse to apologize for covering the machine."

"Oh, well," said Sylvia, "we do not cover ours, and perhaps in consequence one has stopped. A little rusty cog-wheel broke, and some old fence wire got across the knife. Two or three teeth snapped off, and we have not got another wheel. I expect you have some?"

"That is so," Alan agreed. "I'm not going to apologize, but we keep a stock of spare parts, and when we expect to hit a stone we carry a few knife-teeth on the machine. You might show me the wheel you want."

Sylvia indicated it, and Alan opened a tool-box.

"The pinion and the teeth will fit all machines of the same make. I expect your hired man will fix them in half an hour."

"The hired man only?" Sylvia inquired.

"Yes," said Alan. "I do not see Colonel Jordan taking down greasy machinery, and I doubt if two or three others would be keen."

"We know your lot's grim competence," said Sylvia, smiling. "Our men were tired and I said I would try to get the wheel, but Branscombe had not one and I didn't want to ask Craythorne."

"When you were at Branscombe's, Craythorne's

house was farther off than ours. I suppose that accounted for it?"

"Not altogether," Sylvia replied in a quiet voice. "Then I hoped you might be in the field. You see, when harvest is over I must go with my aunt to Montreal, and I do not know if I can get across again. She goes to England and I might be at Montreal for four or five months."

Alan got a knock. When Sylvia was gone the plains would be dreary. Somehow he could not picture his stopping at Fairmead when she was not at Oulton. Then she had implied that she must see him before she went. Well, he must try for calm, and for a moment or two he looked straight in front. The moon flooded the plain with silver light, and Sylvia saw his brows were knit.

"One mustn't be selfish," he remarked. "At Montreal you'll get dances, sleighing parties, and thrills on the toboggan runs. Well, I hope you will have a splendid holiday. And I suppose you are keen to go?"

Sylvia gave him a smile that fired his blood.

"You try to play up. I hope you find it hard; and I am not keen to go. The trouble is, I think I must. For one thing, Mrs. Jordan suspects I sometimes meet you, and she's resolved I shall not do so when she is away. She is clever and very firm, and now and then I'm afraid. Besides, if I refused her, she would know why I rebelled. She might send me to England. And I'd sooner stop."

Alan's control went. He took her in his arms and kissed her. He rather thought Sylvia kissed him, but his heart beat and he did not know. After a mo-

ment or two she firmly pushed him back and sat down on the platform of the machine.

"Well," she said, "I suppose I was shameless, but I knew one of us must be frank, and I might not see you another time for ever so long. Besides, the proper rules do not always go. However, we mustn't be ridiculous; and I think you ought to stop by the wheel."

Alan sat down on the platform, and since the space was narrow, he put his arm round her. He was, of course, ridiculous, but Sylvia admitted she loved him. The strange thing was, although he was carried away by emotion, he thought her cool.

"My dear," he said, "I have loved you since the day we gathered wild strawberries, but I durstn't let myself go. Now I've been wildly reckless, I'm not as sorry as I ought to be; but for your sake I'm bothered."

"I tempted you; but, after all, I was forced. However, we mustn't be theatrical. You are my lover. What are we going to do about it?"

"My plan is to ride across in the morning and see Colonel Jordan," said Alan soberly. "Although he'll, no doubt, be savage, I don't know another line."

"You are very noble; but if you go to the Grange they will banish me to England for good. You do not know madam, my aunt."

Alan clenched his fist. His look got stern; in fact—for the moonlight touched his face—Sylvia thought he looked like his relation who captured the highwayman.

"You are mine," he said. "All that's mine I keep. If I cannot persuade your uncle, I'll carry you off."



"When you talk like that you are very nice; but we mustn't be fools. I have about thirty pounds a year, which I cannot get unless my uncle writes the check. Have you much money, Alan?"

Alan laughed, a rather dreary laugh.

"My fortune is about two hundred dollars, but I'm not remarkably dull, and others get ahead. Although I oughtn't to persuade you, on the Pacific slope work does not stop in winter, and people get good pay."

"But you engaged to stop at Fairmead. James Bryce gave you the post, and I expect he has some plans for you—oh, yes, I understand you want nothing from him; but you did engage, and you mustn't cheat."

Alan said nothing. Sylvia was logical, and she resumed in a gentle voice:

"After all, we must front the sort of entanglement others have fronted. I am not very extravagant; I'm perhaps more useful than you think, and I could go without; but if you took a workman's post we might be separated. Besides, if I allowed you to carry me off, I could never go back. For one thing, I'd hate to admit my husband was forced to let me go. Well, my dear, we must not be rash."

"Then, I see nothing but entanglement," said Alan bleakly. "Only that you might lose most, I'd sooner risk all on a bold plunge to break through."

Sylvia put her hand soothingly on his arm.

"Yes, I know, but we must weigh things; your promise to the Banker, and some others. Then, you see, although we are lovers, we are not entitled to think that is all that counts. One mustn't be altogether reckless because one is in love. In Canada,

at all events, a man's main business is to do some useful work, and I suppose a woman must wait for her lover and try to be resigned. That is all, Alan; we are not passionate neurotics, and as long as it is possible we must use the proper rules."

She got up and calmly gave him her hand.

"I love you, my dear; but I will not run away with you."

Alan kissed her and put her on her horse. He waited until she melted in the dark, and then started slowly for the homestead.

## XVII

### INDIAN SUMMER

FALL melted into Indian summer. The wheat was cut and the stooks stretched back in long rows across the stubble. The wind had dropped, the nights got cold, and by day still white clouds floated in the tranquil sky. All was very quiet, and when the moon was full the beat of wings traveled far. In the barrens by the Polar Sea winter advanced fast, and cranes and ducks and geese steered South for the Caribbean. As yet, however, warm sunshine touched the prairie, and every man and horse at Fairmead was occupied.

Soon after the last swath was cut, the thrashers hauled their mill into the field, and from daybreak to sunset thin blue smoke went up from the tossing dust where the separator throbbed. The engine was large, and the gang, paid by the bushel, drove her recklessly. For a few weeks yet they could labor, but winter is long, and sometimes a workman's money melts before the snow in spring.

The engine burned wood, and Alan, driving the supply wagon, thought she insatiably devoured the billets and water. The wheels scored a trail to the cord-stack and creek, and his arms ached from using the pump. Speed was important, for the nights got ominously cold. Keith knew where every man was and how much flesh and blood could do, but an ex-

hausted man might change his job, and sometimes Alan joined the separator gang.

Dust rolled like a fog about the noisy mill. Chaff and hot cinders showered upon the men. One's eyelashes and nostrils soon were clogged, sometimes to see was awkward, but one must pitch the heavy sheaves to the feeders. Moreover, one must not get in front of the next man's shining fork.

In the meantime, the cleaned wheat flowed steadily from the pipes and must not run over when the sacks were full. A large sack carried four bushels, two hundred and thirty pounds, and two loaders-up seized the ends and tilted the middle across a stick. Then they swung their strong bodies and the sack went into the wagon, but the teamster himself must move the stuff to its proper place. When for two or three hours Alan had helped load up, he admitted he had had enough.

He saw much depended on the superintendent's control. To stop the separator, or allow the filled sacks to pile up, was unthinkable; all engaged must work by plan and their labors synchronize. The loaded wagon, going one way, crossed the light wagon coming back, and when the first stopped, help must be supplied to stack its freight in the barn. For a time, one carried the sheaves to the thrasher; and then, as the cleared belt widened, one moved the machine ahead. When a pitcher lost speed he was moved, and Alan began to see that efficiency was humane. A dull, bullying boss might exhaust his gang, but to break a man was not economical. Well, the Griers were efficient. They got results, and yet the harvesters willingly worked for them.

All the grain, however, was not carried to the

barn. Keith had not room for the crop, and for part he used the prairie wheat-bin. An elevator went up, like a crane's jib, from the top of the mill and poured beaten straw on the stacked bags. By and by the stuff would consolidate and keep out frost and snow.

So long as the light held, Alan labored in the field. He hardly knew all he did, and when he rode back for supper his skin and clothes were grey with dust, and he carried a confused impression of speed and strain. For a time after supper he recorded the number of bushels in the wheat-bin and the sacks in the barn. Then supplies must be tallied and bills be checked. Fairmead farm was a business proposition, and James Bryce must know what his wheat had cost. When Alan put up his books he could hardly drag himself to bed, and sometimes he did not bother to pull off his clothes.

In the meantime Sylvia and Mrs. Jordan started for Montreal. Alan saw her but once, for ten minutes, when dusk was falling. He drove his wagon to the rendezvous, and stood by his tired horses, his workman's overalls stained by dust. Sylvia noted his effort to brace up, and her glance was pitiful. She felt they were altogether unimportant and somehow forlorn.

Talking quietly, she engaged to write to Alan, and declared she did not want to go, but for her to rebel might justify Mrs. Jordan's suspicions and she might be banished for good. Yet, although she would not for some time see Alan, Spenser Craythorne could not embarrass her, and that was something.

Alan looked up. The fellow's hostility had puzzled him, but now he saw a light. It looked as

if Craythorne knew he had cause to be jealous, and reckoned on Mrs. Jordan's support. Sylvia agreed.

"I had not thought to talk about it, but I begin to be afraid," she said. "Mrs. Jordan is not really my relation; she's my uncle's wife, and for some queer reason Spenser is her favorite. He's *arrogant*; you feel he believes that all he wants is his. Then he's not scrupulous; I think Branscombe and one or two more come near to hate him. But for leaving you, my dear, I'd be glad to know he could not bother me. Yet one does not like to run away."

"Your pride's fine," said Alan. "I don't see you run away, but you mustn't, for my sake, risk fresh embarrassments. If you're happy at Montreal, you ought to stop as long as possible. When you are at the Grange, to know you are about is something, but to feel you must steal out to meet me hurts. Then I hate to feel, in a way, I'm cheating Colonel Jordan."

"Yes, it jars," Sylvia agreed. "Still, when one is poor one cannot always be as scrupulous as one would like. But it does not look as if you were very much disturbed about Spenser Craythorne."

"For one thing, I know your stanchness," said Alan with a smile. "Since I carry Craythorne's marks, I mustn't boast, but when he knocked me out at the sloo I was not knocked out for good. He clutches at all he'd like to have; we stick to all we've got, and to rob a Scot is an awkward job. You are mine, and only you can break my claim."

"And I never will," Sylvia declared.

She felt she did not rashly promise. She and her lover were young, and he was stained by a workman's toil, but, standing by his tired horses, he was

soothingly large, and strong. She knew his sincerity and his steadfastness; moreover, she knew something about his relations, the stubborn Grier-Dalrymple clan.

Alan kissed her. His kiss was rather respectful than passionate, and he touched her gently, as if he thought she might be jarred, but Sylvia liked him for his modesty. They made no plans. Since they were young, they were hopeful, but a note of resignation marked their quiet talk. When Victoria was queen young lovers did not recklessly deny the rules that went in the circles to which they belonged.

By and by Alan put Sylvia on her horse, and when she vanished got on board his wagon. He was dull and tired, but he fed his team with proper care, and when he had got some food went to his office. Although he was Sylvia's lover, he was James Bryce's servant, and his work must be carried on.

When thrashing was over, the wheat-hauling began. One started at daybreak, and nooned for an hour or two by a bluff where the yellow leaves fell. In the late afternoon one reached the settlement, and, if one's luck were good, got one's place at the elevator by dusk. Rows of farm wagons waited and box-cars blocked the tracks.

In the evening the Fort William freight picked up a fresh load and the long string of cars rolled heavily away, but the elevators did not stop. Lights burned behind high windows, driving-belts rattled, and so long as a farm wagon waited steam blew about the iron towers. Tired horses drooped their heads, and sometimes Alan went to sleep on the sacks. The wheat was going East, flowing like a swollen, yellow river across the plain and through

the tangled woods, and until the flood began to sink, teamster, train, operator and brakeman must stubbornly hold on.

At daybreak one again took the trail and, going light, drove leisurely. As a rule, when the sun was warm Alan lay on the empty sacks and slept. The horses knew the track, and when he reached Fairmead he must put up a fresh load by dark. If he met Latour and Onslow, going to the railroad, at noon, he sat by their fire and smoked. When one's job was hauling wheat, one rested where one might; and, anyhow, one must think for one's patient team.

Alan liked the journeys to the railroad. To be alone did not bother him. He liked to follow the curving trail and see the plain roll back. Now and then he happily studied a letter from Sylvia. Sylvia did not use slang and was not romantically extravagant. Alan sensed a sort of balance, and for all her gracious kindness, he imagined she was shy; but when he talked with Sylvia he himself was shy. Since she acknowledged him her lover, his business was to think about her deferentially. Love was not altogether a physical passion.

In the meantime the leaves were falling, and soon the bluffs were but clumps of slender trunks. Frost began to sparkle in the grass, and then a savage north wind blew the first snow across the plain. As a rule, on the Western prairie the snowfall is light and the clumsy bob-sledge is not much used. On the thinly-covered trails wheels ran smoothly, and one could put up a nearly full load, but when the storm broke Canadian winter began.

Janet Bryce had given Alan a good skin coat, and he pushed fine hay into his rubber boots, but at first,



when he harnessed his team in the bitter morning, the cold frankly daunted him. Although the best mittens he could buy enclosed his fingers in a fleecy bag, his numbed hands were nearly useless and he was forced to ask another's help to fasten the straps. Yet when the team at length was harnessed, he must start for the railroad, and he must get there on his feet. To haul the load was all the horses could do, and unless he moved fast he might freeze. Canada certainly was not a country where one got rich without some effort.

By and by the Banker telegraphed them to hold the wheat, and for a time, when they had hauled the logs already cut from the bluff and the stable chores were done, they were satisfied to smoke and talk by the red-hot stove. Kate went to Brandon, where she had friends, and Alan thought the homestead bleaker when she was gone. To hear his aunt hoped to visit with them was some relief. Janet declared she felt entitled to a holiday, and it was long since she had seen her relations in the West. Montreal was sixteen hundred miles off, and one was four days in the overheated cars. For an old lady, it was something of an adventure.

Alan met Janet at Winnipeg, where one must wait for the westbound train; and since he got there first, he walked about the streets. On Main Street he thought he saw Kate go into a hotel, but when he inquired at the office her name was not in the register. Well, he supposed he was mistaken, and, anyhow, the Griers understood Kate was at Brandon.

Some time afterwards he saw Craythorne. The sidewalk was not wide and a bank of dirty snow went along its edge. Alan stopped in the beaten

path. Craythorne had annoyed Sylvia, and when they met at the narrow spot one must get off into the snow. If Craythorne hesitated, he hoped to throw him off.

Craythorne advanced carelessly, as if he did not know Alan waited. His big coat was not the sort of skin coat the prairie farmers used. Alan thought it and his cap Revillon fur. Well, in a few moments he hoped to roll the expensive coat and its wearer in the dirty snow. He was, of course, ridiculous, and the Winnipeg police did not allow one to fight in the city's main street, but to put the fellow off the sidewalk would be worth a five-dollar fine.

Then he clenched his fist. Craythorne went into a cigar store. Alan waited for two or three minutes, but when Craythorne came out he stuffed a parcel into his pocket and turned the other way. Alan had no grounds to think him afraid; the implication was that he refused to bother about his waiting antagonist. There was no use in running after him. Alan felt he needed an excuse for a dispute, and now the other was in front he saw none.

In an hour or two his aunt arrived and they got supper at a hotel. Janet Bryce did not look at all fatigued and talked cheerfully about her holiday. After the social functions and dinner-parties at Montreal, to visit at a prairie farm was like going home. Her hosts were her own folk; although James had got rich, the Bryces not long since were frontiersmen. Alan reflected that at Montreal his aunt was something of a great lady, but he did not see her disturbed about discomforts that might daunt another.

She stated that the Banker was satisfied with the reports he got from the farm. Janet herself imagined he ought to be satisfied, and he had once or twice admitted that he believed his nephew was going to be a useful man.

Alan smiled. He knew his uncle's caution, and at one time he was not ambitious to be thought a good clerk of the works. Yet the Banker's approval was worth something and, as a rule, was not lightly given. For some time Janet and he talked happily, and then went to the station and boarded the westbound train.

## XVIII

### SNOW

**D**ARK clouds brooded over the white plain and the afternoon was intolerably cold. Alan, beating his numbed hands, thought the gloomy horizon advanced, as if the small frame houses occupied the center of a contracting circle. Nobody was in the one-sided street, and but two or three farm wagons waited by the elevators. Although the lakes were frozen, some wheat yet went East by rail, and the locomotive pushing a few box-cars along a side-track banished the rather oppressive dreariness.

Alan stood by the operator's office. The line went, straight and level, across the circle; the telegraph poles getting smaller, and at length melting in the waste. In the foreground the snow was dead white, streaked where the surface was broken by dingy blue. Farther back it was cold, dull grey. Alan's breath froze on his skin coat's collar, and now and then he brushed off the icicles. His rubber boots were stuffed with hay, but his feet smarted; however, so long as they hurt, he knew they did not freeze.

He had gone to the settlement for groceries and stopped for the night. He had thought to start in the morning, but some clothes his aunt expected from Montreal had not arrived, and he imagined the parcel might be on board the next train. Any-

how, it justified his waiting, and he hoped the mail might carry a letter from Sylvia. Jordan was at Montreal, and when Alan last heard from Sylvia she stated that she might return with her uncle.

By and by the livery stable keeper's sleigh jolted across the rails. So far as Alan knew, there was not another sleigh at the settlement, and when the man pulled up by the sidetrack, where the locomotive was starting, he joined him.

"Hello, Adams!" he said. "You're driving a rather unusual rig."

"She's a dandy," said the other. "I sent for her to Montreal. When the snow is good, sleigh-shoe steel runs smoother than wheels. The boys are sure old-fashioned and I reckoned to show them something fresh. The Adams' livery plans to be in front!"

The steam from the horses floated about like a thin cloud and Alan remarked that it looked as if Adams had driven fast. The livery man nodded.

"I was at Latimer's, but when the sky thickened up I pulled out for home. My team are trotters and I guess I knocked some minutes off the ten-mile record. Anyhow, I'm glad to be back. She's working up for bad snow, and if you're not stopping for the night, you want to start."

Alan agreed that the gloom was ominous, and when the locomotive rolled by he went to the operator's office. The shack was roofed with iron, the clapboard walls were thin, and the young fellow occupied a box by the stove.

"When I'm at my desk I can't use my hands, and the company ought to give us ink that doesn't freeze," he said. "If you want to telegraph,

nothing's doing. A blizzard's raging east of Adelaide and the wires are down. Anyhow, if I wanted to make Fairmead, I'd get on a move."

The livery man had said something like that, but Alan had not yet fronted a Northwest blizzard, and his team, although not very fast, was strong. Sitting down, he gave the operator his tobacco-pouch and inquired about the train.

The other said the express had made Adelaide not much behind schedule, and he was holding up the wheat freight for her. Since snow had not yet begun to fall in his section, he reckoned she would arrive in about forty minutes. Alan waited. The red stove snapped, sometimes the iron roof cracked, and he heard the wind in the telegraph wires. Although he had not pulled off his coat, he shivered.

At length a whistle called and he went to the door. Thick black smoke rolled along the track, and by and by a bell clanged. The smoke blew away, and dry snow leaped about the locomotive's wheels. The big machine rolled by, sooty and black by contrast with the snow-crusts cars. A savage storm was rather obviously raging not far off, and Alan hoped the postmistress would soon sort the mail. In the meantime he must find out if the parcel his aunt expected was in the baggage car.

The station had no platform, and Alan, hurrying by the wheels, saw a girl on a car steps. She turned her head, and when he knew she was Sylvia he thrilled. For all her thick furs, she was slender and light, and his impulse was to lift her down to the line. Perhaps she knew, for she gave him a warning glance and he saw Colonel Jordan at the

vestibule door. Jordan went carefully down the snow-crusted steps and looked about.

"Although I telegraphed, nobody seems to be here to meet us," he remarked. "The operator was perhaps unable to send on the message."

Alan said he understood the storm had cut the line. His team was the only team from the Oulton neighborhood, and although he would be glad to help, he had but a Clover-leaf wagon. Jordan frowned.

"It's awkward, but I dare say we can hire a rig. I see the baggage-hands are throwing out our stuff and I'll go to the livery, Sylvia. When you have got your luggage, you might join me."

Alan took their brass checks, and when her uncle went off Sylvia remarked:

"I'm rather disturbed about him. The cars were hot, and at Winnipeg the snow had disorganized the traffic. Nobody knew when the train would start, we were forced to hang about, and the station was icily cold. However, there's my trunk and uncle's portmanteau."

Alan helped a railroad man move the luggage and went with Sylvia to the livery stable. Jordan sat by the stove in Adams' office, leaning against a table, across which his arms were stretched.

"Mr. Adams is unwilling to give us a team," he said.

"You can't have my horses," Adams agreed. "If I loan you them, I mightn't get them back for a week, and I reckon you ought not to go."

"I cannot stop at the hotel for a week," said Jordan moodily.

His face was pinched and Alan thought him ill. If he himself were ill, an eight-foot, half-warmed bedroom at a prairie hotel was not the sort of room he would like to occupy.

"I start in ten minutes, sir, but the trail is snowy, and the horses, of course, cannot haul a wagon as fast as a light rig."

"Now we have got it!" Adams remarked. "If the Colonel's set on goin', you can have my sleigh and I'll loan you my buffalo robes. But you want to leave your baggage and hit up the pace. Better eat before you start. I'll yoke the team."

They went to the hotel. In the Northwest three meals a day are served, and a customer who arrives after the proper time must go without. Alan doubted if they could get food, but the landlady was willing to indulge Sylvia and gave them coffee and cold meat. Alan, looking about the bleak and rather dirty dining-room, sympathized with Jordan's resolve to get home.

"I'm afraid I am selfish, but the storm might block the trails, and I really would not like to stop," he said.

"You mustn't stop," Sylvia declared. "I expect we'll be at Oulton before the snow begins. But I think I hear the team."

The sleigh was at the steps, but for a moment or two Alan hesitated. The wind pierced his coat and his hands got cold in his thick mittens. It was three o'clock, but he doubted if he could see for two miles across the flat plain, and the dark sky did not look much higher than the elevator towers. Alan glanced at Sylvia inquiringly.

"We must risk it," she said.



Jordan got in the back seat; Alan helped Sylvia up beside him and seized the reins.

"Drive like hell," said Adams, and let the team go.

The runners jolted across the rails, and they took the road. In the beaten track the steel shoes ran smoothly; the horses had rested for twenty-four hours, and were keen to get home. Alan did not need the whip and he put his arm round Sylvia. He had fixed a Hudson's Bay blanket and Adams' buffalo driving-robe across them both, and Sylvia nestled against him. The cold was Arctic, and, if Jordan remarked their nearness, might account for much.

Alan's uneasiness began to vanish. The wind was behind them, the team pulled nobly, and the sleigh ran faster than the jolting wagon. He saw a bluff on the horizon swiftly advance and the blue-grey trail melt under the drumming hoofs. The runners slid along with a soothing swish. Dry snow curled up like the foam at a fast steamer's bow.

All the same, his hand got numb, and if he shifted the reins, he must move his arm from Sylvia's waist. Under the thick robe, she was so far gently warm, and by and by she pressed his clumsy mitten against her side. He, however, must concentrate on pushing the team along, and to talk was awkward. His lips were stiff; he thought they cracked in the frost, and where his steamy breath touched his furs it froze.

At length Sylvia pressed his arm and he turned his head. A large snowflake brushed his face and he felt as if the cold burned his skin. Jordan, buried to his mouth in the buffalo robe, looked up.

"The loop trail by Davidson's is two miles longer, but I dare say Mrs. Davidson would take Sylvia until we could send across for her."

"I am not going to stop at Davidson's," Sylvia rejoined. "The house is very small, and when you get home I expect you'll need me."

"You musn't exaggerate," said Jordan, and turned to Alan. "My niece thinks herself a nurse and she wants to experiment. When we were running through the woods the colored porter stoked up as if he wanted to get the car as hot as Louisiana; and at Winnipeg they turned us out to wait for some hours in their freezing cattle-shed. We durstn't go to a hotel. Their rule is not to inform passengers when they hope the train will start."

He coughed, and Sylvia said, "You mustn't talk. The brandy flask is in your right pocket. Take a drink and pull the robe across your mouth."

It looked as if Jordan did so, and she turned to Alan.

"I'm afraid we ought not to have started, but I durstn't let him stop at that cold hotel. However, I mustn't bother you, and the team is pulling splendidly."

Alan drew her closer. His driving hand was numb, but Sylvia, pressed against his body, might keep warm, and the horses knew the trail. Snow blew about them and the light was going.

"We are going to make it," he said with pretended cheerfulness. "Our horses are not as fast as yours, but they are stronger. At Fairmead we use animals that can move a load."

He was forced to shift the reins, lest they slipped from his powerless hand. The light was nearly

gone and the snow rolled by like waves of fog. Alan did not think all fell from the low sky; some was stripped from the frozen plain, and he doubted if flesh and blood could front the wind that blew behind the sleigh. Yet he hoped he kept the trail, and although the steel runners dragged in the loose stuff, the horses ploughed ahead.

The light went, but after some time he saw indistinct trees on his left hand. That was all right; the trail went round Oak Lake Bluff, and he knew where he was. Then he saw trees in front and on the other side. Brush cracked under the runners, the team stopped, and he was entangled in the bluff. Giving Sylvia the reins, he jumped down and went to the near horse's head.

In front was a fallen poplar, with sharp, broken branches, and the torn undergrowth went half way up the horses' legs. The thin trees tossed and roared, and the snow drove through the wood like smoke before the Arctic blast. In the sleigh the thick robes were some protection; now the cold was stupefying. Alan imagined that, had he been alone, he might have frozen in the bluff. Perhaps it was strange, for Jordan was ill and Sylvia was but a slender girl; but to know they depended on his efforts helped him brace up.

He must get back to the trail, and on one side he thought he distinguished a break in the trees. The horses, however, could not move ahead, and if they pulled transversely they might capsize the sleigh. For a moment Alan pondered, and then Sylvia joined him.

"If we stop, we'll freeze," she said. "Where can I help?"

The wind nearly drowned her voice, and Alan was forced to shout.

"Pull the team round and steer for the gap. Perhaps I can hold up the sleigh."

Sylvia vanished, but the horses began to flounder in the wild currant bushes and dead branches cracked. Alan saw Jordan get down, but he did not know what he did. He braced his back against the sleigh and savagely tried to force the runners into line with the horses' altered track. Sylvia had turned the animals and they began to plough ahead. The sleigh tilted; for a moment or two Alan thought he carried most of its weight on his bent shoulders; and then he felt the off-side runner drop back into the snow. Brush cracked, he gasped and shoved, and they laboriously advanced. If the gap was not wide and the horses were again entangled, they were done with.

The team, however, did not stop; the indistinct trees dropped back, and he knew they had reached the open plain. Pushing Jordan on board, he helped Sylvia up and felt for the reins. He noted that she had fastened them to the front rail.

"When you steer for Oulton, the bluff is on the right hand," she gasped.

"We are not going to Oulton; I doubt if we could get there," Alan replied. "We must trust to the horses' keeping the Fairmead trail."

Sylvia began to think it a forlorn hope, but she said nothing, and they plunged into the blinding white cloud. All the comfort was, the horses were going somewhere steadily and the wind was yet behind them. There was no use in trying to calculate

speed and distance, for the awful cold numbed one's brain. After a very long time the team stopped and Alan awkwardly got down. In front, small trees bordered a ravine. So far as he could distinguish, the ravine curved in a sharp bend, and he knew where he was. Then somebody touched him and he saw Sylvia.

"The big loop," he said. "The bridge is three or four hundred yards east."

"Then, we have overshot the farm?"

"Fairmead's a mile and a half back," Alan agreed. "The trouble is, we must turn and meet the wind."

It looked as if they were beaten. The trail had long since vanished, and Alan remembered Keith's tale about a farmer who was frozen and buried a hundred yards from his house. All he had for guide was the savage wind, and when he went to the near horse's head the team refused to face the gale. Well, he dared not leave the sleigh; he could not carry Sylvia to the farm, and Jordan would soon go down.

Shoving and beating the horses, he forced them round, and for a minute or two dragged them along. His hand on the bit-links would not bend; he dared not lift his head, but he thought somebody urged the other horse.

"Get back under the robe!" he shouted.

The wind cut Sylvia's voice, but he imagined she refused, and the horses began to move faster. Perhaps his shouting encouraged the animals. He did not try to guide them. It was possible they knew the line to their stable, but he certainly did not. At

all events, they were now going somewhere as fast as he could stumble along, and after a time he ran in front and seized Sylvia.

"If you fell or got left, I wouldn't know," he gasped, and awkwardly lifted her on board as the sleigh went by.

To get back to the horses was hard. The team went faster, and he tried to calculate. Three miles an hour, and since they turned at the ravine five minutes had gone. If they did not make the farm in half an hour he would know they had not kept the proper line. But there was nothing to indicate when the thirty minutes was up. All that was certain was, if they missed the homestead, they soon would freeze.

At length he thought the ground was rough under the drifting snow. In the fall he had helped Keith put down manure and straw where the trail crossed a sandy belt. If he had hit the spot, he must bear to the left, and he forced the team to follow the supposititious track.

For some time he blindly plowed ahead; and then, when hope was almost gone, a faint light trembled in the snow. After a few moments the horses stopped, and four or five yards off the homestead windows shone. Alan saw the house was lighted as if for a festival, but he shouted for Sylvia and dully helped Jordan from the sleigh. Then he pushed back the door and, firmly holding Sylvia, plunged into a hot and dazzling room. For two or three minutes that was all he really knew. His head swam and his breath was labored. His fur cap went on the floor and he felt the blood surge painfully to his frozen skin.

When he braced up, Keith and Latour helped Jordan away to bed. Janet had carried off Sylvia, and Hortense was occupied at the stove. She said a hired man had taken the horses and Alan was not to bother. They had put all the lamps they had at the windows, but she well thought it was by good chance only he had reached the house. Now she must make the soup. She had not the proper stuff, but what would you have? The soup, at all events, would be hot, and if one did not like it, there was coffee.

Janet arrived with Sylvia, whom she pushed into an easy-chair by the stove; and then went off. When she again arrived, Sylvia said:

"You are very kind, but in the morning we must try to move my uncle to the Grange."

"He will not go in the morning; I expect he will be here for some time," Janet replied. "When the blizzard stops, we might get a doctor from Adelaide."

Sylvia gave her an anxious glance. "I was afraid; I tried to get him home. You think him really ill?"

"It looks like pneumonia," said Janet, in a quiet voice. "However, you must brace up and help me nurse your uncle. An old woman knows much about sickness, and I believe we will soon put him on his feet."

Alan saw Sylvia had got a knock, but he thought Janet's hopefulness was some comfort. One knew Janet Bryce was competent.

## XIX

### JORDAN'S CONVALESCENCE

**T**HE blizzard raged for three days, and when a messenger was able to reach the settlement the crisis of Jordan's illness was past. The hired man, however, got the stuff Janet wanted from the drug store, and although the Adelaide doctor did not arrive, she was soon satisfied about Jordan's recovery. In fifty degrees of frost one cannot move an invalid, and it began to look as if Jordan was resigned to stop.

"When the poor man is better we will let him go," Janet remarked one evening. "In the meantime, he needs to be cared for, and Mrs. Jordan is in England, where she properly belongs."

Alan smiled. His aunt was a Scottish Canadian, which, from her point of view, was perhaps not altogether the same thing as a Canadian Scot, and she half consciously reckoned the English an inferior race.

"Oh, well," he said. "I expect one might meet ladies of Mrs. Jordan's type in Edinburgh. Besides, you do not know her."

"Do I not?" Janet rejoined in an indulgent voice. "I do not know if her eyes are black, but I'm thinking they're cold, hard blue. It's not important. Weel, I ken her sort."

Alan thought it possible. His aunt had been for some time at Fairmead, and people talked. More-



over, if you but gave her two or three salient points from which to work, she would supply you with a remarkably accurate character sketch.

"The fact is, Aunt Janet likes to finish a job," said Keith. "On the whole, I reckon she has made as good a job as the Adelaide doctor." He laughed and went on: "We did not get the doctor, but after hauling cordwood in the frost, I don't claim to be mechanically accurate. All I wanted was to indicate that our aunt need not apologize for sticking to her patient."

"If accuracy is very important, I am not your aunt."

"Ah," said Keith, "you are aunt to all who need you, and I believe you like the title."

Janet smiled. The lad was keen and he was her relation. Although she got old, she loved young people, particularly the young fellows who now politely bantered her. She approved their strong athletic bodies and their frost-darkened skin; she knew their steadfastness and their instinctive honesty. At one time, she had been afraid for Alan; now she acknowledged him her sister's son. Yet he had inherited something from a weaker stock, and when James called him from England he, as James's habit was, planned wisely.

"I am a vain old woman and you know where to flatter me," she said. "Then I'm thinking my patient and his niece do not embarrass you."

"That is so," Keith agreed. "If I could draw, I'd like to paint Miss Dane's portrait. She's the most beautiful and gracious thing that ever was at Fairmead. She certainly does not disturb me; I don't know about Alan."

Alan thought "disturb" a curious word for Keith to use, but he rejoined coolly:

"You said something like that another time, and you might perhaps have waited until our Aunt Janet was not about."

"Kate was here," said Janet. "She's a kind and bonnie lass."

"Comparison is invidious," Alan remarked with a twinkle. "Keith used the superlative, which, in the circumstances, was worse. Then Kate is his relation. Let's hear how he puts things straight."

"I think I'll let it go," said Keith. "While you loafed by your office stove, I was loading cordwood in the frost."

He looked round, for Sylvia came in. Alan and he got up and went to fetch a chair. When he saw they steered for the same chair, Keith stopped.

"Ye must choose," said Janet. "The laddies ought not to have forced ye; but youth moves fast, and does not stop to think."

"The trouble rather is that one did not move fast enough," Keith remarked.

Sylvia smiled, and Alan imagined she perhaps enjoyed the situation. It was, of course, not important, but he thought his aunt interested. Well, he knew Sylvia would strike the proper note, and not by calculation.

"Now I know why the elder son inherits an estate, and it does not imply that you weigh his qualities against his brother's," she said. "Well, I think Mr. Grier is oldest and he was first on his feet."

"I saw you first," said Keith. "Since one tries to be just, I admit Alan was looking the other way."

"Your modesty is attractive," said Sylvia. "I

will use your chair. Then, when I am about, I feel people ought not to look the other way."

She sat down, and Janet said: "We were talking about beauty. Keith is something of an artist, and I think he claims a beautiful woman is marked by more than physical charm."

"I wonder," said Sylvia in a thoughtful voice. "Beauty depends on color and form. A flat curve and a muddy tint might spoil the picture. The spirit that moves us has nothing to do with things like that. Some famous women were frankly ugly."

"The spirit molds the body. If your face were a blank, your pose might express alertness, resolution, speed——"

"And their opposites," Alan remarked.

"Oh, well, nobody who is slack and slow and indulgent is really beautiful."

"But some get fat," said Janet. "What about them? I expect a number would sooner be thin and strenuous."

"Some get sick, ma'am. Since we are human, I suppose we must carry the burden of the flesh. After all, the flesh is a burden."

Sylvia laughed. "You talk like a monk, Mr. Grier."

"I am a farmer, Miss Dane; by tradition a Presbyterian, but in some respects I have not much sympathy with my Puritan ancestors. They had not much use for beauty and they hated art. If they had seen my pictures, I guess I would have gone to jail."

Sylvia liked his humor. She liked Alan's relations; they claimed to be farmers, but his aunt was something of a great lady. Then she noted that Alan acknowledged Keith was host and was willing

for him to lead the talk. The young men she knew were cultivated, but when she studied Alan and Keith she sensed a sort of earnestness and solidity her friends had not. The quality was elusive; she thought it something they had inherited from the strong frontiersman stock.

Alan noted that Sylvia, so to speak, was not exotic at the rather austere homestead. He felt she harmonized, but she did so unconsciously. Sylvia did not pretend. Artifice had nothing to do with her charm; Sylvia was charming because she was herself.

They engaged in careless banter, and Janet quietly went off. Her patient needed food and she must see if Hortense had warmed the broth. Janet was frankly proud of the cure she had worked, particularly since she had for a day or two imagined her best efforts were in vain.

Upstairs, Jordan occupied the easiest chair his hosts could supply. At length he had been allowed to get up and he wore a blue Hudson's Bay blanket for a dressing gown. The night was calm and he heard the cedar shingles on the roof crack in the biting frost, but the room was, at all events, comparatively warm. In winter the Grange was not, and when funds permitted, his wife fled to Montreal, and sometimes to England, in order to escape the cold.

Jordan's look got thoughtful. His house was expensive and cost him money he ought to use on the farm, but when Millicent was not there nothing went smoothly. Although he thought Sylvia competent, she was not allowed to meddle; from the beginning Millicent had not liked the girl. Sometimes Jordan

was sorry for Sylvia. Since he was her trustee and her other relations were either dead or indifferent, he had given her a home. Her mother's fortune, tied up until the girl married or was twenty-five, was about fifteen hundred pounds, but she ought presently to inherit a larger sum. Nick Dane could not live much longer; some people thought the old wild-rake had already lived too long.

Anyhow, Jordan admitted that when young Hale carried him to Fairmead his luck was good. For two or three days all he knew was that he had escaped the frost; and then he began to see that the fat, voluble Frenchwoman was a first-class nurse. Moreover, his quiet, swiftly-moving host was a useful valet. All the same, he knew they carried out another's orders, and when he was well enough to study his head nurse his surprise was keen. In fact, he hoped it was not obvious.

He had vaguely pictured a large, dominant woman, marked by something of the Scottish peasant's stamp. Miss Bryce was not at all like that. One knew her a gentlewoman, and for all her white hair, she was beautiful. She moved harmoniously, her voice was cultivated, and although she sometimes used a Scots idiom, it went like an epigram. Yet, as it were behind her graciousness, one sensed the strength and firmness of her Northern stock.

The door-handle rattled, and Janet, carrying a small tray, came in. Jordan began, rather awkwardly, to get up; but he was weaker than he thought, and Janet signed him to be still.

"You will take the broth and not trouble to talk."

Jordan obeyed. Perhaps a convalescent's returning appetite accounted for something, but the broth

really was first-class, and the toast was cut in small neat cubes.

"You may have another two or three spoonsful, but you mustn't get up," Janet remarked.

"No, thanks. I mustn't be greedy. In fact, if I did not know your kindness I'd be embarrassed. Am I allowed to state that your *habitant* cook is mistress of her art?"

Janet smiled, and Jordan resumed:

"You were cook? Since I did not know, my compliment was sincere. Your nephew brought us here in a blizzard I could not have fronted had I been well. You cured me, and Mr. Grier was as useful as a trained nurse. Since he is also a good farmer, one is justified in thinking you a remarkably competent lot."

"Competence ought not to be remarkable," Janet observed.

"Oh, well," said Jordan, smiling, "I think I really meant typically competent."

"Some families, and perhaps some races, inherit useful talents. However, in Ontario fifty years since all who were not useful were forced to quit or freeze. Then in Scotland a hundred years since, stern frugality was the rule."

"Frugality is another thing."

"I think not. If you squander effort, or money, you cannot be useful."

"Your philosophy is stern," said Jordan. "Well, I suppose in Canada we must submit to rude Natural Selection, and the unfit are soon weeded out. But what about our experiment at Oulton? I don't know if we are remarkably useful, but we are not extravagant. I'd like you to be frank."

"Then I doubt if you experimented at the proper spot. The Northwest is not a Sahibs' country."

Jordan looked up. Miss Bryce, of course, knew Canada; he had not imagined she knew much about the circles in which he at one time had moved. Yet her remark was to the point.

"You have friends in India?"

"The world is the Scots' inheritance," Janet replied with dry humor. "Our folk must go where they can find a job, and some go to India, but they are not pukka Sahibs, of the Army and the I.C.S. Our mark is the banks, the jute mills, and cotton presses."

"I expect all are commercially efficient, but my object is to help young fellows who are not. The Army is expensive, and I doubt if my pupils could satisfy the Civil Service examiners. Then Oulton is a sort of refuge from the squalid ugliness that marks competitive industry. You have perhaps seen a Lancashire manufacturing town and villages where Scottish miners live? Sometimes I think the corn-law Tories were justified; they wanted a quiet, green England, crowded rick-yards, and well-cultivated farms; the population we could not feed they would transplant abroad.

"After all, it was an honest ambition. The British are colonists by instinct, and we have no men in our cities like the Cornstalk Australian and the New Zealanders. In fresh soil, our boys might grow to splendid manhood. Well, Canada is ours, by conquest and settlement."

"A British possession?" said Janet dryly. "About a hundred years since, some rash English Imperialists helped to found the United States."

"I am rebuked," said Jordan, smiling. "All the same, if the Canadians refuse to be British, they will soon be, for example, German, Polish, or Slav. There's my main argument."

"It is my brother's argument and carries some weight. I believe it accounts for his starting the Fairmead colony, although his colonists are not the type you choose."

"I must use the material I know. Then I admit the other sort does not need any help I could give."

Janet laughed. "We are independent; some people think us *thrawn*. But, on the whole, are you satisfied with your experiment?"

"Sometimes I am anxious," said Jordan candidly, and knitted his brows. "I believe my motive is good and I try to be hopeful, but if I had a few young fellows like your nephew, I would be more hopeful. The boy is cultivated, but one notes a sort of practical efficiency. I understand he was at Cambridge."

"He was sent down," said Janet. "I believe it's the phrase you use."

"Something like that has happened to other spirited young fellows. I imagine your nephew's exploit was rather foolish than shabby."

For a few moments Janet said nothing. She saw Jordan was interested, and for a man she thought him keen. Well, she had studied his niece, and watched Alan when the girl was about. The young people were not as discreet as they perhaps thought. Janet frankly approved Sylvia, but she saw some obstacles.

"Alan is a good lad. We hope he will be a good farmer, and it is possible," she said. "His mother's folk were hardy, frugal Pioneers."



"But his father?"

"The Hales were country landlords, English sportsmen and gentlefolk, although Alan's grandfather was a clergyman, and it looked as if he was not rich. At all events, he was not anxious to claim the boy, and had he done so, we would not have agreed."

"Yet to spring from stock like that is an advantage."

"We think not," said Janet. "We hope he has inherited his Scots grandfather's qualities."

Jordan waited. Janet knew she had excited his curiosity. Since he was not a fool, he had seen the young people attracted each other; he, of course, knew James Bryce was rich. Moreover, he probably knew Mrs. Jordan was not Sylvia's friend. Janet herself had surmised as much.

"Alan's father was worthless," she resumed. "He was marked by a queer charm and his impulses were kind, but he wanted much and I think imagined himself exempt from the rule that a man must labor for all he gets. At all events, he was willing for others to supply him, and his habit was to take the easy road. The easy road goes downhill."

"I mustn't think you hard, dear lady. For one thing, I do not know the circumstances."

"The Scots are hard," said Janet. "I hated the man, but I hope I'm just."

She pondered. To meddle was rash, but if she knew her nephew, she thought he would approve, and she imagined he had told Sylvia who his father was. Jordan and his wife might be jarred, but in a way they were not important. Janet knew Sylvia's courage; the girl would stick to her lover.

But she was really moved by pride. Her folks did not cheat; not so much because cheating was immoral, but rather because they refused to be shabby. The Bryces courted nobody's favor and refused to pretend. All they were entitled to they took, and held, with a firm hand. Anyhow, she was not going to cheat an Englishman whom, for all his Englishness, she liked.

"If you are interested, I will tell you about Alan's father," she resumed.

Jordan thought the tale moving, and he knew it accurate. Miss Bryce had stated she hoped she was just. He noted the level glance with which she searched his face, her Northern calm, and her quiet voice. When she stopped, his look was respectful, and he said:

"I must thank you for your frankness; perhaps I'm allowed to state your stanch honesty. Since the boy is your sister's son, I believe he will make good. His inheritance from the other side is perhaps a handicap, but he is obviously the stuff to carry his load. Well, it looks as if you loved him. Were his other Canadian relations as broad-minded?"

"Our folk are frontiersmen," said Janet with a smile. "I rather think the Griers and D'rymples forgave Dick Hale for the sake of his last exploit. His ride for the boundary in the snow was something of an exploit, and he baffled the Royal North-West Mounted Police. Well, he was frozen, but he had paid for his folly, and at the end we were not ashamed for him."

Jordan pictured Red Rob's carrying the highwayman to the Grange. The sober Scots were a strange lot, but under their utilitarian sobriety he supposed

there lurked the Borderer. Miss Bryce, however, got up.

"We have talked for some time and the evening is very cold. I think you ought to go to bed," she said.

## XX

### KATE'S RETURN

JORDAN'S recovery was fast, and soon after he and Sylvia returned to Oulton Janet Bryce started for Montreal. Alan went with her to Winnipeg, and when coming back looked up Kate at Brandon. Kate had left her relations' farm and taken a post at a store in the little town. She declared she would sooner be a saleswoman than occupy herself with household chores at a prairie farm.

Alan noted that her clothes were fashionable, and when she joined him in the evening and they went to a concert he approved her fur coat and cap. Kate certainly was attractive, and he remarked a rather labored fastidiousness in her talk and the way in which she carried herself. Kate was resolved to be ladylike, and although a Brandon store was perhaps not a first-class school, it looked as if she made some progress. Moreover, she had joined one or two musical and evening-lecture guilds. Alan admitted he ought not to be amused. Kate's ambition was good, and when she shyly displayed her fresh accomplishments he flattered her. For all that, he felt her proper part was the frontierswoman. Kate on a savage range-horse's back was altogether admirable.

The musical guild's concert was not good, but it occupied some time, and when it was over Kate gave Alan coffee and biscuits at her lodging. Since his

train did not start until the early morning, they had an hour or two for talk, and she was keen to know all he could tell her about their friends and neighbors on the plains. He noted that she sometimes steered the talk to Oulton, and his narrative about Jordan's illness interested her; but when she heard that Sylvia was at Fairmead she showed the jealous hostility he had remarked before. Alan did not see why Kate disliked Sylvia, but she certainly did so.

At length he went to the station. At the top of the little hill where the street goes down to the track, the wind blowing across the river from the snowy plain was intolerably cold, and in the draughty waiting hall he nearly froze. The westbound train, as usual, was not running on schedule, but the operator allowed him to sit by the red stove in his office and he was half asleep when the locomotive bell began to toll.

Soon after his return to Fairmead, Kate's father and Jim Kerr arrived. Hugh Dalrymple, like most of his clan, was large and rather grim. When the frost stopped the work on which he was engaged at Medicine Hat, he contracted to cut telegraph poles in the Manitoba woods, and since his camp was not a great distance off, he had for a few days come down to his farm. He inquired about Kate, and seemed to be satisfied with all Alan could tell him, although Kerr was sullen. Alan understood Jim had planned an excursion to Brandon, but Kate had not agreed. Anyhow, Jim was not entitled to be jealous, and Alan had nothing to do with Kate's not wanting him to look her up. He tried to be civil, but to see Kerr start for his farm was some relief.

After his holiday, Alan thought winter drearier.

Sometimes the cold was daunting, and water froze a few yards from the kitchen stove. Sometimes dusty snow blew about like fog and one felt the house tremble in the Arctic blizzard. Then the wind dropped, and although for the first hour the frost cramped one's muscles and cut one's breath, one went to the bluffs for birch logs that had dried in the fall. The cordwood stack was large, but fuel melted in the throbbing stoves, and Keith laid up reserves against the times when neither man nor teams could front the snow.

The wheat farmer did not feed stock, and when the stables were cleaned and stove billets split there was not much to be done. For an hour or two Alan tried to occupy himself at his desk; in the afternoons he frankly loafed and smoked. Keith studied philosophy, mended harness, and painted when his colors did not freeze.

All longed for spring, and at length the snow melted and boisterous northwest winds dried the dead white grass. To steer the plow in the sunshine braced soft muscles and stirred thin blood. After six months' winter, Alan rejoiced to get to work, and when the steaming clods stuck to the mold-board and the plow-point jarred on frozen blocks he did not grumble.

Two or three weeks after the plowing began, Kate returned to Rob. Hugh Dalrymple was not yet back from the woods, and had rented his farm to another. Kerr talked about selling his and moving to the Pacific slope. When Alan met him he was moody, and it looked as if Kate's firmness accounted for his resolve to go.

Then Keith, coming back from Rob's one Sunday,

stated that Kate would visit with them. He understood she had taken a holiday and wanted to stop for a few days before she returned to the store. Kate arrived. At Brandon Alan had thought her happy and high-spirited. Now she was quieter; he seemed to miss something of the joyous confidence for which he had liked Kate.

When he came home from the field one afternoon with some broken harness, he found Kate in the stable. They were not using all the horses, and she said she would go for a ride. She had forgotten something at Rob's and did not know if he understood she wanted him to send her trunk to the railroad. David Kerr, Jim's uncle, would carry a message to Rob.

Alan doubted if she could reach Kerr's farm in time for supper. He thought her highly strung, but she was anxious to be off, and he put a saddle on a horse. The days were getting long and when dusk fell he strolled down the homestead trail. By and by he met Kate. She was riding quietly, but he saw foam on the bridle and noted that the smoking horse's hair was white. When she stopped, her pose was braced and she clenched her hand on the riding quirt. Well, he knew Kate's temper hot, and if she had found Rob at Kerr's, they perhaps had jarred.

"It looks as if you had ridden hard, but you did not take the shortest line from Kerr's," he said.

"I did not go by the bridge," Kate agreed. "We jumped the creek at the big bend where the willows are."

"Then your nerve is pretty good; I doubt if Ranger would have carried me across. The bank is high and the landing's treacherous."

"Oh, well, if I'd gone down, I hope you'd have been sorry," Kate rejoined with a laugh. "I think you would, for you are a good sort. But perhaps you have sometimes felt you didn't mind if you broke your neck?"

"That is so. All the same, I have oftener felt I'd like to break the other fellow's neck; but I'd hesitate to experiment on Red Rob."

"Rob means well and he's cleverer than I thought," said Kate, in a hard voice. "Then I expect nobody can properly humiliate you, unless you have helped. The thing that hurts is to know you have been a d—— fool yourself."

Alan saw something had moved her strongly; but he knew Kate's moods, and for him to be humorous might be rash. He led the horse to the stable, and when he got a light Kate waited by the door. The beam from the lantern touched her face and he saw her look was fixed and strained; then she turned and passionately threw the riding quirt in the straw. Kate had obviously got a bad knock. The affectation he had remarked at Brandon had vanished; she was a primitive frontierswoman. To study her, however, was something of an impertinence, and he put the horse in a stall.

Kate waited. Alan thought she noted where he hung the harness, but when he moved the lantern her tense figure melted in the gloom. He knew she had not gone, and he pictured her standing, braced and stiff.

"Will you give me some matches?" she asked when he hung up the extinguished lantern.

Alan broke a block and gave her half, and they



went out. Kate went slowly, as if she was not keen to reach the house.

"If something has hurt you, Kate, I'm sorry," he said. "I suppose I cannot help, but if it's possible——"

"Yes, I know," said Kate, in a gentler voice than she yet had used. "The trouble is, you did not fall in love with me. If I'd wanted, at the beginning, I might have got you—but I didn't want. Maybe I'm a stubborn fool, but I go where I choose. Anyhow, I don't choose my lover to please father and Rob."

Alan felt the blood leap to his skin. Kate's candor was embarrassing, but he imagined her carried away by savage emotion. He said nothing, and she laughed.

"You didn't guess? Well, I allow you are modest, and anyway, after you began to meet Miss Dane—— But, if I was the Banker, I'd smash the Oulton gang. They've got all anybody ought to want, but it's not enough, and if they could, they'd push us off the earth. However, I guess *you* hate that painted woman at the Grange. Only for her some might forget they are gentlefolks. The Colonel's human."

"To meddle with the Grier clan is rash, Kate. It might, in fact, be dangerous."

"Now you talk like a frontiersman," Kate approved. "You are a frontiersman, and if you are in love with Jordan's china-doll niece, why don't you saddle up Ranger and start with her for the boundary? But you'd want to be careful, because if you jolted her, she might break. If I could see madam's face in the morning after, I'd laugh——"

She stopped, as if her passion were exhausted, and Alan saw they were at the bottom of the veranda steps. Kate hesitated, and then gently touched his arm.

"After all, we were good pals, and now I've done with the plains, I hope you'll stay with your job and go ahead. If Hortense asks, you can tell her I'm tired and went to my room. That's all. For the land's sake, don't start her worrying about me!"

She went up the steps. Alan had begun work at sunrise, and when he had smoked his pipe he went to bed. A cracking board disturbed him. He had pushed up his window and the cold implied that dawn was near, but so far as he could distinguish, day had not yet broken. All the same, a board did crack, and he imagined somebody moved about with cautious steps. Kate's room was in the passage, and by and by a faint noise, like a woman's dress brushing the wall, seemed to indicate that she stole past his door.

Alan thought it strange. When the days were long, one slept until the rising sun called one to get up and work, but Kate was disturbed and moody. He began to be bothered about her. She was a first-class sort; he liked her strength and courage, he rather liked her imperious temper. She had called Sylvia a china doll, and had meant to be scornful; but Kate knew nothing about Sèvres porcelain and the comparison was not altogether ridiculous. Sylvia was marked by the delicate grace the old French potters modeled. One pictured her moving daintily in a minuet, and on the terrace at Versailles when Louis XVI was King. Alan thought it was Versailles; anyhow, the dance was slow and stately.

He did not see Sylvia dance a *carmagnole*. Kate might; in some circumstances Kate might carry a pike. But he was a Canadian plowman, and he thought Kate stole across the veranda. He wondered dully where she went, and in a few moments was asleep.

In the morning, Onslow, the English lad, stopped him on his way to the stable.

"Do you know where Ranger is? I suppose Miss Dalrymple brought him back last night?"

Alan looked about the stable. The horse and saddle were gone.

"I think I know," he said. "But get busy. The chopped hay's nearly gone and you haven't dumped the oats I gave you into the bin."

Onslow understood he was to say nothing about the horse, and he got to work; but when Alan went for breakfast and Hortense reported that Kate was not in her room, he speculated.

"She's gone for a walk," said Keith. "Anyhow, I must see the boys start. Come along with the hash."

Hortense shrugged. A girl who wore city shoes like Kate's did not go for a walk when the dew was on the grass; but she served breakfast, and Keith and Alan went off to the field.

When they got back for dinner Kate had not returned, and Keith, finding the horse was gone, supposed she was at Rob's. Alan doubted, but said nothing. It looked as if Kate had started before daybreak, and he imagined she would sooner he did not talk about her excursion. In the afternoon Rob arrived.

"You have one or two reserve teams and I guess

you can loan me a horse," he said. "I've been working my young span hard, and the bay is collar-sore."

"You can keep Ranger," Keith replied. "Kate rode him across."

Rob looked at him with surprise.

"She's not at my place; I didn't expect her. In fact, we sort of disagreed and she reckoned she'd stop with you."

"It's queer," Keith remarked.

"Kate is queer; she's *thrawn*," said Rob. "Anyhow, I haven't seen her, and they don't want her at Brandon for three or four days. We have got to find out where she is."

Keith turned to Alan.

"You and Onslow were at the stable first thing in the morning. Was Ranger in his stall?"

Alan, as carelessly as possible, said the horse was not, and Keith gave him a puzzled look.

"And you did not think it strange?"

"I've known Kate go off for a ride in the morning before," Alan rejoined with a touch of embarrassment, for he saw Rob studied him. "However, you knew she was not at breakfast, and it did not disturb you."

"All I thought about was getting to work," Keith agreed.

"You are bully hosts," Rob remarked. "A girl comes to stop with you and takes the road at day-break. At five o'clock in the afternoon you begin to wonder where she's gone! Well, I'm going to find out; I know the daft besom. Get a move on your cook. Soon as I eat, I start for the settlement."

Jade is perhaps the nearest translation for the

Scottish besom, and Alan rather sympathized with Rob; but when the others went off he was relieved. It looked as if they might think him Kate's confederate; if he were not, his finding the horse gone ought to have excited his curiosity. Well, his curiosity was excited and he began to be anxious. Although Ranger sometimes worked in plow-harness, he was fast; the Northwest farm horses were a lighter type than the big Clydesdales one used in the Old Country.

At the end of a long furrow Alan loosed his team and went to the house. Rob was at supper; Keith smoked his pipe and his look was preoccupied.

"You are quitting soon," he remarked.

"I am going to the railroad; Kate's my pal," Alan replied. "However, I expect we'll find she got on board the Brandon train."

The glance Rob gave him was keen as steel, but he nodded.

"Then ye'll need to eat. I don't know when we'll get breakfast, but I'm thinking the team will be badly tuckered before we are through."

Hortense loaded Alan's plate and resumed her labors by the stove. Now and then she glanced round, as if she studied the group at the table, and Alan thought her look disturbed, but somehow scornful. All the same, Rob must not wait, and he concentrated on his supper. Keith gave them fresh horses, and when the wagon jolted along the trail Rob turned and fronted Alan.

"Before we go farther, d'ye ken where Kate is?"

"Honestly, I do not," said Alan, and hoped his voice was level, for he felt his face get warm.

"Aweel," said Rob, "ye're lucky, because I ken ye're not a liar."

Alan agreed. When the other talked like a Scot one knew him moved, and Rob in an angry mood was dangerous. Since Alan arrived at Fairmead he had twice been forced to fight, but he did not want Red Rob for his antagonist. He said nothing. Rob used the whip and the wagon jolted faster along the rough gumbo track.

## XXI

### ROB TAKES THE TRAIL

**D**USK crept across the quiet plain, and when the reflections from a locomotive's headlamp trembled in the sky the night was dark. Rob drove fast; if they could reach the settlement before the Calgary freight pulled out, he ought to find the agent at the station.

"We have got to make it," he remarked.

The team labored across a sandy belt, and he took the grass. In the dark one must risk badger holes, but he urged the horses along. In front, the headlamp's beam yet flickered for two or three miles along the track and the lights in the hotel and pool-room began to get distinct. When they jolted across the rails, Rob stopped the smoking horses and jumped from the seat. The freight train noisily pulled out, and for a minute or two Alan tried to sooth the plunging animals. In the meantime Rob stopped the station agent.

"You know my niece, Miss D'rymple," he said. "I suppose she went out on the Brandon train?"

"She didn't buy a ticket."

Alan joined them, and saw Rob hesitate. They must not yet excite curiosity.

"A passenger might get a ticket on board the cars," he remarked.

"That's so," agreed the agent. "If Miss D'rym-

ple got on the cars, she must have been at the depot. If she was about I'd have seen her, but I did not."

"Well, well," said Rob, "she's maybe at Willows, where we have some friends, and before she starts for Brandon she ought to know her father's coming back. I have a message for him. Can I get the operator?"

The agent nodded and they went to the office, where Rob wrote laboriously on a telegraph form.

"Dalrymple, Sproat's Creek, Riding Mountain, station Carberry. How will you deliver it?"

"We won't," said the young fellow, with the bluntness that marks the Western telegraphist.

"Well, well," said Rob, and wrote: "*Five dollars guaranteed to messenger.*" "I suppose ye'll charge for yon?"

"Sure. The company's tariff is on the wall. But I want to shut down this office. Are you going to write a book?"

Alan smiled. The young fellow did not know the man he bantered and Rob's calm was ominous.

"*Got a job for you at home,*" he wrote. "*Hit the trail at once. Will pay you to quit.*"

He put some money on the desk, and when they reached the wagon leaned against the wheel and loaded his pipe.

"Kate was not here, but if ye start from Fairmead, the White Creek flag-station is not much farther. Between midnight and morning the Fort William freight goes through, and the operator must be about. Are you going on with me?"

"I am going all the way, Rob," Alan replied.

"Well, I believe you honest, though others might



have their doubts. I do not know where the trail will end and we might need some food."

Alan had thought they might need money, and he had brought some. The store was shut, but the merchant occupied the rooms above, and Alan got cheese and crackers and a roll of small bills. Then he rejoined Rob, and they started east across the grass. White Creek was about twenty miles off and there was not a trail. For the most part, the farms were north and south from the stations, and when one went east or west one took the cars. The line was single, and since the White Creek water was good, the company had built a tank, and a sidetrack where the heavy freights might wait for faster trains to pass.

The night was dark, and all Rob had for guide was the telegraph poles, which he sometimes lost. In places the wheels ran smoothly on the short grass, but now and then they ploughed through gravel, and sometimes small brush crackled under the horses' feet. Sometimes they circled round a sloo, and once or twice Alan heard the wheels crush buffalo bones. When the telegraph poles vanished he admitted he was lost, but Rob was a plainsman and seemed to know by instinct where he ought to steer.

For a time a grass fire sparkled on the top of a distant rise and the smell of burning floated down the wind. Then the long yellow smear faded behind them and by contrast the plain was very dark. The team got tired and in a sand-belt Rob used the whip. They must make White Creek before the freight train stopped.

Wheels rattled, traces slapped, and the horses'

feet beat a dull, soothing rhythm. On a cloudy night much dew does not fall, but Alan liked the smell of the damp soil. The spring-seat creaked and jolted, and letting himself go slack, he swung about. After a time the movement got mechanical; his body to some extent was asleep and only his dull brain was occupied.

He saw circumstances had entangled him. It looked as if he was Kate's lover; in fact, the Kerrs and Dalrymples might use an uglier word. They were a grim lot and to convince them might be hard. All the same, it was not very important. He *was* Kate's pal. To think a young man and an attractive girl could not be friends unless they were lovers was ridiculous.

Alan frowned. Kate had implied that she might at one time have carried him away. Perhaps she did not boast. Bonnie Kate! The phrase haunted him. Had he got it from an old ballad? Anyhow, Kate was bonnie, and he knew her proud. There was the trouble. If she had not got on board the cars, they might find her in a lonely bluff. She knew where Keith's pistol was. Alan chented his fist, but he dared not dwell on the picture, and the keen emotion went. He was young and he had begun work at sunrise. Now he imagined midnight was gone.

The wagon jolted, and for a moment he thought he was over the wheel. It looked as if the lurch had wakened him, but he must not risk another, and he got down in the wagon bottom. The horses' provender-bag cushioned the shocks and the night was not cold. By and by Rob looked round. Alan did not move, and he breathed evenly. If the lad

had but pretended he had nothing to do with Kate's flight, he would not be asleep.

After a time, Alan, pushed by the whip butt, looked up. The small vague trees in front probably bordered a creek; and then he saw telegraph poles and a tall water tank. When they passed the tank he saw a yellow light, and Rob stopped in front of an iron cabin. They got down, and Alan glanced about.

Near the tank a trestle bridge carried the main line across a wooded ravine, which, turning in a sharp curve, followed the sidetrack. In the front of the cabin a window shone, and sparks blew from a pipe that pierced the roof. A hundred yards off, the trees by the ravine melted in the gloom.

Rob tied the horses, and when he pushed back the door a young fellow in a chair by the stove jumped up.

"What in hell do you want?" he asked.

"Maybe we're going to Brandon; I don't know yet," said Rob, and sat down on a box. "Where's the Fort William freight?"

The operator, moving quietly but fast, went to the telegraph. When his hand was on the key he turned.

"The first train for Brandon comes along in about twelve hours. The freight has not made Westwood, and I can stop her. What's she got to do with you?"

Rob laughed and pulled out his pipe.

"You're a right smart boy, but we don't want to hold you up. If we meant to rob the company, we'd go where some dollars are, and I have not much use for a freight locomotive."

He threw the young fellow his tobacco-pouch. Rob was particular about his tobacco and did not use the tin-flag plug.

"Take a smoke, and let's talk. Did you sell any tickets for Brandon in the afternoon?"

"I did not," said the other, and smelling the tobacco, began to fill his pipe. "Nobody went."

"Somebody might have bought a ticket on the cars. Looks as if you flagged the train. Do you remember all you did?"

"I signed the expressman's bills for some parcels, and gave Mike in the baggage car a dollar to buy me a pipe. Then I ran along to warn the engineer to watch out at the curve by Crane Lake where a construction gang is at work. I'd sidetracked the ballast train to give him a clear road."

"The ballast cars were in your sidetrack? You were on this side of the passenger train all the time?"

"That's so," agreed the operator. "The only trail's on this side, and goes to Winston's, about three miles off."

Rob pondered. Alan imagined he weighed all the other had said, and when they arrived had studied the ground.

"Very well. We are going to Brandon. We have got to go, and we can't wait for twelve hours. When the freight stops for water you will put us on board, but we don't want to beat the company, and we'll buy our tickets. Now I know the company's rules don't allow passengers in the caboose, but on the Western road you can for five dollars break most any rule you like."

The young fellow hesitated, but when Alan gave

Rob his wallet he supplied the tickets and pushed back two bills.

"I've charged you on our tariff. These are yours."

"I reckon not," said Rob. "If you throw them at the roof, you'll know where they belong."

The other smiled. The joke was old, and implied that the company's servants took the money that did not stick to the roof.

"Now there's my team," Rob resumed. "When the freight pulls out you're through. I reckon you can drive, and you might take the rig to Winston's. We expect to be back in a day or two, and we'll pay for the horses' keep."

He gave the operator another bill, and, going out, gave the horses a drink and some provender from the bag.

"Do you think Kate did get on the train?" Alan inquired.

"I hope she did, and it's possible," Rob replied. "If she went East, she didn't mean us to follow her, and Kate is pretty smart. Then, you see, the ballast train was in the sidetrack and the young fellow was on the other side of the passenger cars. If she had waited in the brush by the creek, she might steal on board behind the train. I guess we'll risk it."

They went back to the office and for some time smoked their pipes. The stove snapped, and now and then the iron roof rattled in the wind. At length Alan heard a whistle and a locomotive bell, and when he went to the door a dazzling silver beam swept by the shack. Thick, sulphurous smoke rolled about him, and the freight cars slowed and stopped. A pump began to clang and he followed the operator to the caboose.

Day broke across a plain as level as a calm sea, and for a time only the straight row of flitting poles broke the grey-white surface. Then two elevators lifted, like a brig's topsails, above the horizon and got slowly larger.

They stopped, and the brakesmen dumped two barrels. When one struck the ballast a hoop broke and the head fell out; but on the Western road nobody bothered about things like that, and prairie storekeepers stated that sometimes a freight train vanished off the map. The laconic station agent gave a brakesman a waybill and, veiled in thick black smoke, the cars lurched ahead.

Sometimes they stopped at a dreary settlement, where a frame hotel, a store, and five or six very small houses bordered the track, and took on board a box. Sometimes only an elevator marked the end of a trail, and if the locomotive did not need water, they rolled past the spot. After the wheat had gone East, Alan imagined one train a week would carry all the goods the prairie settlers shipped.

By and by the sun got hot and the caboose stove went out. Now and then, where the plain rolled, a team cut the skyline, and when dust tossed behind the horses one knew they pulled the disc-harrows. For the most part, however, all one saw was silvery shining grass and the telegraph poles flitting past. The train advanced leisurely. For one thing, the locomotive must take water after about thirty miles. Then they stopped for an hour in a lone sidetrack, until smoke and dust streaked the plain and rocking, crowded emigrant cars rolled by. Dim faces blocked the windows; uncouth groups clustered on the platforms and steps. Alan was vaguely sorry for the

tired folk. The West perhaps was not all they thought and hoped.

At length, in the hot afternoon, Brandon's roofs topped the ridge where the tableland drops to the river, and when they were a mile or two from the town small, bent figures moved about the track. The whistle called, the train slowed, and a brakesman climbed down from the roof.

"Here's where you get off," he said. "Watch your chance when she passes the construction gang."

Alan, fronting the locomotive, balanced on the step. Dust and cinders beat his bent head, and the train yet went ominously fast. The brakesman leaned out from the door, and Alan imagined if he hesitated the fellow would firmly push him off. Well, he must not fall under the wheels, and swinging backwards, he let go.

He plunged against a track-mender, who dropped his shovel and sat down in the stones. The track-mender swore; Alan breathlessly apologized, and saw Rob stagger across the ties.

"What's the matter with you?" Rob asked the voluble railroad man.

The other gave him a quick glance. Perhaps he thought Rob was the sort one rashly provoked, for he grumbled and went for his shovel. Rob pushed Alan and started along the track at five miles an hour.

Brandon was a small, quiet town; for all its wooden houses and broad plank sidewalks, Alan thought it somehow English. In the street that climbs the hill, he beat his dusty clothes and knocked the locomotive cinders from his hat.

"I suppose we'll go first to the store?" he said.

"As fast as you can move yourself," Rob agreed.

Alan was not very hopeful, but to see the storekeeper would banish the suspense. When they asked for him, a clerk sent them to an office at the back of the drygoods shop. Rob inquired if Miss Dalrymple had arrived, and stated he was her uncle. The other looked up with surprise.

"Then you don't know she turned down her post?"

Rob's look was inscrutable, but Alan thought he had got a knock. Now the suspense was broken, he himself was tired and slack. Rob said he believed Kate had started for Brandon the day before, and it was important for him to find her. Might he ask why she had quit? The storekeeper called his wife and the group began to talk.

Kate was a good saleswoman and her employers were satisfied with her. The lady stated that Kate's friends were the sort she approved for her own daughters, and her girls liked Kate. The man added that when he knew she would not stop he was rather annoyed, but since she was going to be married——

"She told you she was going to be married?" Rob asked sharply.

The storekeeper hesitated, and his wife replied. Kate had bought some smart clothes and made some others; she was a good milliner. The girls bantered her about it, and she admitted she might be married soon, although she refused to talk about her lover.

"We have friends at a farm four or five miles back," Rob remarked. "Maybe she has gone to them."

"No," said the storekeeper. "If Miss Dalrymple had got off the train, we would have known. Be-



sides, Paton was in town this morning, and he said nothing about her. Mrs. Paton sent the girl to us."

Rob thanked him and, when they were in the street, turned to Alan, who saw he clenched his fist.

"She did believe she was going to be married. Some d—— swine reckoned Kate D'rymple was not good enough to be his wife. If I can find him, he'll be sorry."

"I feel rather like that," said Alan. "But our clue is broken."

Rob nodded. "There's no use in bothering Paton. We'll try again at Fairmead, but we must wait until the night train goes out. The hotel's on the street by the depot and I want a drink."

## XXII

### JORDAN SYMPATHIZES

**A**LAN and Rob reached Fairmead in the dark. Since they started from the homestead behind the flag-station they had driven forty miles. The afternoon was hot, the team had had enough, and for the last hour or two Rob moodily concentrated on forcing the tired animals along.

Alan, however, did not want to talk, and although he felt he ought to ponder coolly, he indulged his vague disturbing emotions. Kate was gone. It was possible she had got on board the cars at the flag-station, but he wondered what she had done with the horse. Since he dared not picture her in the brush by a lonely ravine, he hoped she was, for example, at Toronto. Winnipeg was small, and a stranger, particularly a girl like Kate, would be remarked. All the same, he doubted.

He was not Kate's lover. To imagine one could simultaneously love two women was, of course, ridiculous; but she had moved him to a sort of sympathetic tenderness, affection perhaps. Although he did not know the proper word, it was not passion. Then Kate, like him, belonged to the clan, and if she were hurt, her injury was his.

In the morning, however, he must try to think for himself. He hoped Rob trusted him, but others might not. Kate's relations knew he was her friend

and some perhaps had reckoned on his marrying her. He was implicated, and he imagined an innocent man might be condemned on weaker evidence.

The wagon jolted, and he saw they were near the house and Keith waited in the trail.

"Well?" Keith asked.

"No news," said Rob. "She's not at Brandon. So far as I can find out, she did not get on the cars."

Keith turned and walked by the wheel.

"Ranger is back. Branscombe was at the settlement and brought word that Adams had the horse. I started and got home about an hour since. He's slightly lame; been down, I think."

"Ah!" said Rob, as if the horse's having fallen were important. "Well, go ahead."

Keith told him all he knew. In the evening after Kate vanished the horse stopped at a lonely farm some distance from the railroad; the bridle was gone and the bit had been removed from the headstall. The farmer was going to the settlement, and tied Ranger behind his wagon. Adams, at the livery stable, knew the horse, and told Branscombe.

When they reached the stable and got a light, Rob examined Ranger. After he found the sore spot he agreed that the horse had fallen.

"He might have come down at a ravine, or where the trail goes through scrub behind a bluff," he said. "The important thing is, his mouth was loose. We'll talk about it afterwards. Let's get supper."

Hortense gave them food, and when Rob admitted he had no good news Alan knew her disturbance sincere. By and by she carried off the plates, and Rob sent for Onslow.

When Mr. Branscombe called, Keith was plow-

ing, and he saw Onslow. Branscombe said Adams told him the horse's shoulder was sore, and when it reached the farm it was very thirsty. The headstall was not broken; somebody had pulled out the straps and let the bit and bridle go. Onslow admitted he had told Branscombe Miss Dalrymple had ridden the horse.

They sent the young fellow off, and Keith remarked:

"We need not bother about Ranger's falling. When Kate loosed the bit and so forth she was not much hurt. My notion is, she purposely let Ranger go when they were some distance from home."

Alan agreed. In order to reach the headstall one must be on one's feet, and had Kate been thrown and injured, she could not have pulled out the straps. She had, however, thought for her horse. The loose bridle might entangle a branch in a bluff, and when the animal was hungry she did not want it to be embarrassed by the bit. Although the fresh grass had but begun to spring, hardy range-horses feed on the dead stuff in the snow. Well, he had not imagined Kate was disabled by an accidental fall.

"Will we call Hortense?" Rob inquired, in a meaning voice.

Keith nodded, and Alan went to the door. He thought Hortense knew the sort of question she would be asked, but as a rule a Frenchwoman is logically frank.

"Maybe you can tell us why my niece stole away," said Rob.

"Me, I am not blind, and I have something of intelligence. *Mais la pauvre petite*——"

"Go on. I think I see, but I've got to know."

Hortense told him. Rob let her go and his look got stern.

"You have got it! All I wanted was a woman's opinion. Well, Kate had some money. If she's gone to the cities, I wish she'd taken all my wad; but I doubt. The lass is proud. I'm thinking we'll find her in a ravine."

"My pistol is in the bureau," Keith said quietly.

"You looked?" said Rob. "Well, that's something, but our business is to search the plain, and you'll start at daybreak. As soon as I roll up the gang I'll take the trail; but we are not going to hunt along each other's tracks. Give me some paper and a pen."

Alan went for the articles. The Canadian Government measures off the prairie, by township and section, in rectangular blocks, and Alan imagined Rob's map was accurate; but since they did not know how far Kate's horse had gone, it looked as if they must search a square whose sides were twenty miles. Then the gently rolling ground was seamed by ravines and dotted by small woods. They had got something of a job, and as soon as possible Alan went to bed.

As a rule, on Sunday afternoons the Oulton colonists rode across to the Grange, and on the Sunday evening after Rob began his search a group occupied the veranda. Mrs. Jordan had not long since returned from England, and she and another lady talked about London functions and so forth. Branscombe leaned against the rails; two or three young fellows, on the steps, engaged in careless banter. Sylvia wondered where Alan was. Since Mrs. Jordan had come back she had not met him.

Where the ground rolled in the distance, two horsemen cut the sky. They rode slowly, and after a few moments another appeared. Jordan went for his field-glasses.

"The first is Robert Grier, and I think the second is young Hale," he said. "Their horses seem tired, but the day was hot."

Branscombe asked for the glasses, and while he studied the horsemen a young fellow remarked:

"As a rule, the Fairmead lot do not indulge in Sunday excursions. In fact, after their exertions for the week, I expect they need a rest. It has nothing to do with us, but I wonder where they went."

"I believe I know," said Branscombe, and turned to Jordan. "I'd meant to tell you, sir. When you were at Fairmead, did you meet Miss Dalrymple, Rob Grier's niece?"

Jordan said he did not, but he had, of course, seen her and knew who she was. The young fellow who had spoken laughed.

"I have met Miss Dalrymple. We were looking for hay and had perhaps got near the Griers' block, for she galloped up on a savage range-horse and ordered me to quit. Rather a Wild-West Amazon, but a remarkably handsome girl. Anyhow, when she declared the hay was theirs, I went. However, I believe Spenser knows Miss Dalrymple."

Craythorne was lighting a cigarette and did not turn his head; but Jordan asked:

"Has she something to do with the Griers' riding about the plain on Sunday?"

"I imagine they are searching for her," Branscombe replied.

Craythorne dropped the match, as if it burned his

fingers, but he said nothing, and Branscombe resumed:

"Three or four days since, a fellow in the back blocks somewhere about White Creek found Miss Dalrymple's horse. Adams, at the settlement, knew the animal, and gave me a message for the Griers. Keith was plowing, but an English lad informed me that Miss Dalrymple started for the railroad early in the morning of the day on which the horse was found. The farmer told Adams the bit was not in the animal's mouth and the straps had been pulled out. In the circumstances, one would not imagine the girl was badly hurt; but I suppose the Griers have not yet found out where she is and are getting anxious."

"If Miss Dalrymple vanished three or four days since, their anxiety is not surprising," Jordan replied. "The straps being loose is strange. I wonder whether I ought to go across and inquire."

"I doubt if the Griers would be grateful," Mrs. Jordan remarked. "It is possible the girl meant to puzzle her relations and is now at Winnipeg or on her way to Montreal. A prairie homestead like Rob Grier's has not much charm for a high-spirited young woman. Then she might have quarreled with her lover; and she might have a lover at a settlement on the railroad. However, it really does not interest us."

She got up and went with the other lady to the house, but for a few moments Sylvia waited by the door. She had noted Craythorne's quick movement and thought him startled. Now she remarked that he was very quiet and turned his head from the others. Perhaps it was strange, but she felt Spenser

knew something about Kate's vanishing. In the meantime, Jordan said to Branscombe:

"After all, I rather think I will go across in the morning. When I was ill the Griers were kind. Besides, I am a magistrate."

"I don't know, sir. They are proud and independent. Then, of course, if Mrs. Jordan's surmise were accurate——"

"My notion is you ought to leave it alone, sir," said Craythorne. "The ground might be awkward. You see, it looks as if Red Rob had fixed on Hale for his niece's husband. The fellow is plausible and rather less of a hayseed than his friends."

Jordan frowned. He turned as if to put his glasses on a chair, and Sylvia stole away. All the same, she had studied Craythorne's face and imagined his calm cost him something; moreover, he did not want her uncle to go to Fairmead. Sylvia dared not stop, but she burned with anger.

"Do you suggest that Hale could account for Miss Dalrymple's disappearance?" Jordan asked.

"You mustn't exaggerate, sir," said Craythorne apologetically. "I, of course, know very little about it; but I do know Hale was forced to leave his University, and his uncle, the famous banker, tried him out at Montreal. Since Bryce sent him to Fairmead, the experiment could not have been a success. Then, after our dispute at the sloo, I'm entitled to state he's not scrupulous."

Jordan said nothing. He knew much that Craythorne did not, and to some extent it disturbed him, but he would trust young Hale where he would not trust Spenser. His wife hoped Sylvia would marry Spenser, and it looked as if the fellow suspected he



had a rival. Well, if Hale were his rival, he was not Miss Dalrymple's lover.

"You're not much of a sportsman," Branscombe remarked to Craythorne. "When Hale beat you at the shooting match he refused to use my London gun, although he knew yours was better than his."

"Since I was the winner in the fight for the hay, you cannot claim I'm revengeful," Craythorne rejoined. "However, if you are his champion, I think we'll let it go. But we have stopped for some time and I must push off."

He went to the house, and a few minutes afterwards got on his horse and took the trail.

"I'm not keen about looking up the Griers. The circumstances perhaps are awkward," Jordan remarked to Branscombe. "Still, they are our neighbors, and if they are resolved to search the plain some help might be useful. On the whole, I feel I ought to ride across."

In the morning Jordan went, and when he reached Fairmead found Rob loading a wagon. Nobody else was about; the others had taken the trail some time since. Rob threw some blankets and a tent in the wagon, and then gave Jordan an inquiring glance.

"I was sorry to hear it looks as if your niece had met with an accident," Jordan remarked. "Since you are loading up supplies for a camp, I suppose you have not yet found a clue?"

He thought he had used some tact, but Rob frowned. For a few moments he went on with his occupation, and then looked up.

"Branscombe will have told you about the horse? We have searched all the bluffs and the creek banks

this side of Oak Lake, and now we cannot get back evenings, we reckon to work east from camp."

"If you like, I will send you a hired man. In fact, if you thought me useful, I might help you map out the ground, and I dare say one or two of the boys would join me."

Rob tied a fresh bundle of blankets, and although he knew Jordan waited, he did not use much speed. Now Kate was gone, he admitted he was fonder of the headstrong lass than he had thought; besides, he felt he had let her father down. Then his stubborn pride was hurt. The clan was humiliated, and if Kate were found, none of Jordan's lot must know her death was not by accident. Moreover, he believed somebody at Oulton was accountable, and he meant to find the man.

"When we need help we'll ask for 't. This job is ours," he said.

Jordan's habit was to command, but he felt he must make some allowance for the other's trouble. Rob threw his bundle in the wagon, as if savage effort was some relief; his eyes were bloodshot, perhaps from strain and fatigue.

"I do not wish to meddle, Mr. Grier," Jordan resumed. "We are neighbors. I believe I have tried to be friendly, and your relations' kindness when I was ill justifies my offer. There is, however, another point of view, and if you think about it, you might see you are hardly entitled to refuse."

"Ye mean, ye're a magistrate? When ye know my niece is dead ye can begin to investigate. In the meantime, all we want is to be left alone, and we and our womenfolk are no' the sort one rashly meddles with."

Jordan was puzzled. He had meant to be sympathetic, and he was sorry for the Griers. Sometimes they jarred, but he could not account for the fellow's queer hostility. Anyhow, he stood for the Government.

"I am a magistrate," he said in a quiet voice.

"Not long since I gave ye a justice's job, and all ye did was to let the fellow go," Rob rejoined, and the veins on his forehead swelled. "I'm thinking I will not bother ye again. Next time I get my grip on a man who's injured me, I myself will punish him."

Jordan turned his horse. There was no use in disputing, and Rob had, no doubt, borne some strain; but while he rode home he pondered, and he talked to Mrs. Jordan about the interview.

"Grier's remarking that to meddle with their womenfolk was rash is rather strange," he said.

Mrs. Jordan's look got thoughtful, but when she saw her husband waited she shrugged scornfully.

"They are an uncivilized lot and boast like savages."

"I do not think Rob's habit is to boast. At all events, if he did so, I expect he'd make good."

"It has nothing to do with us, and they want to be left alone," Mrs. Jordan replied. "Your plan is to indulge them. Mr. Hale perhaps knows where the girl is, but I expect she has run away and joined a lover at some prairie town."

## XXIII

### NOT PROVEN

A FULL moon rose behind the bluff, the night was rather cold, and two fires burned in the grass. By one, confined between two logs, the cook watched his frying-pan and coffee-pot, and a tired group languidly talked and smoked. By the other, the search-party's leaders held a council.

Hugh Dalrymple had joined the party in the afternoon, and Rob narrated all that they had done. Keith now and then added fresh particulars, and sometimes Hugh asked a question. Another Dalrymple and David Kerr, Jim's uncle, had joined the search at the beginning, and at intervals one or the other nodded his agreement. Behind them the thin birch and poplar branches shook in the wind and somewhere a coyote howled at the moon. In front, smoke blew in flowing curves about the brushwood fires and the dark, bent figures in the grass.

The party, working by compass, had searched nearly all the belt Rob calculated it was possible for Kate to cross. The bluffs were numerous, but none was large and the brush was not yet thick. Rob imagined she might have cheated the young fellow at the flag-station and got on board the cars; but if she had done so, the railroad conductors whom Keith had questioned at the settlement did not know her portrait. The Canadian Pacific conductors did not

cross the country on the long-distance trains; each worked a local section.

Rob was satisfied Kate had not got a fresh horse; he had inquired at the farms she might have reached. She could not have walked to Winnipeg, at Brandon she was known, and a stranger would be spotted at the small settlements. Yet, so far as the party could find out, Kate was not on the plain. Rob admitted he was baffled.

Another thing annoyed him. His inquiries could not be kept secret, and a Winnipeg newspaper had printed a romantic tale. As a rule, a Western newspaper does not use much reserve, and the reporter enlarged upon the prairie girl's exploit, as if he were satisfied it was rather an escapade and something of a joke than a tragedy. Keith had gone to the railroad and telegraphed a Winnipeg lawyer, but Rob doubted if the editor's apology would help much.

Alan, riding for the camp, saw the fires some distance off. He thought Jim Kerr was not far in front, but he did not push his horse. The animal was getting tired, and, as a rule, Jim was sullen and morose. In fact, it looked as if the nerves of all got raw. Alan understood that Jim had planned to emigrate to Oregon and had but waited in order to join the search.

There was another thing. Rob expected Hugh Dalrymple, and when Alan reached the camp he would, no doubt, be questioned. He was sorry for Kate's father, but he was not going to be bullied, and after the strain all had borne, control might be hard. Anyhow, if Jim Kerr was nasty there would be a fight, and in the circumstances to allow the fellow to keep in front was the proper plan.

Jim reached the camp first and joined the leaders by the fire. He reported that he had followed the line Rob indicated, but had found nothing. Dalrymple ordered him to sit down, and for a few moments brooded. Although he had built a small shiplap house and broken some ground on his farm, he was a carpenter and for the most part occupied himself with railroad construction. Where a trestle must be strengthened, or a fresh road bed for the sinking line be laid across a muskeg on brush and logs, Dalrymple undertook the job. He began to be famous, for engineers and contractors found out that Hugh's jobs stood. He was not at all cultivated, and his talents were mechanical, but he was not a fool.

"We have got to talk, Jim, and talk quite straight," he said. "Rob can't find my daughter, but he's not yet beat, and I am going to try. To fool us might be risky, and so far as I can reckon, if Kate's alive, but one of two men might put us on the proper track. I'll ask you first. Do you know where she is?"

"I do not," said Jim, and getting up, fronted the group. "If I did know she was all right, but didn't want you to worry her, the sure thing is you'd never find out from me. You aimed to get rich on the railroad and left her alone. Rob got after her all the time, like he was a blasted school-ma'am, but he didn't watch out where he ought."

Dalrymple regarded him thoughtfully. Rob smiled, a dry indulgent smile.

"Maybe you're right, Jim; but to get het up will not help."

"I am het up; I'm a man with a man's feelings,"

Jim rejoined, and addressed Dalrymple. "You knew I wanted to marry Kate; for most as long as I remember she was my girl, and all I waited for was to build a house and break my farm. Now the farm's broke, but Keith will use it, and in a day or two I pull out for the Pacific slope. Well, I thought Kate was willing, but you sent her for a winter to Toronto, and when she came back she was not the girl I knew. She'd found out she was beautiful and she's got ambition. Kate has brains, and if you'd wanted her to be happy on the plains you should have kept her there."

"That's so. But it's my business, Jim."

"It's mine, Hugh. When Kate was home she had no use for me. Rob knew, and I s'pose he reckoned Hale was the man for Kate, and he'd fix the fellow with the finest wife he'd get on the prairie. Maybe he thought the Banker would put up a wad for them. Well, he sent her to Fairmead and he was fooled, but to know he was fooled is not much comfort."

"You are pretty keen, boy, but I had another notion," Rob remarked grimly. "Anyhow, I was cheated. Well, I suppose you have told us all you can."

For a moment Jim hesitated, and then he turned to Dalrymple.

"I can't tell you where Kate is. If I knew she was happy, you might take all I've got, but I think she's dead. Hale had nothing to do with it. I hated the d—— tenderfoot, and he put me over the hotel rails, but he's not the man you want to look for. That's all; I guess I'm through."

Dalrymple signed that he was satisfied. Rob

pondered; Jim, himself, was not implicated, and he had rather generously exculpated Alan, but Rob imagined he kept something back. However, if he did so, one could not force him to talk.

"Very well," he said. "At sun-up you'll take the trail for the lake and camp there for the night. Then you'll steer south for Jasper's and wait for Onslow."

"Three or four days before I'm back! I'd like a shorter line."

"Rob's orders go," said David Kerr. "If you are tired, you can quit."

Jim shrugged. His look was sullenly inscrutable, and he went off.

"The boy is my nephew," Kerr remarked. "All I got to say is, you heard him, and he's not a liar."

Dalrymple nodded and loaded his pipe. The clan were not plausible and as a rule did not bother to be polite, but to some extent their candor sprang from pride. To knock out the other fellow was easier than to cheat.

"I've got to see young Hale," said Hugh.

Ten minutes afterwards Alan advanced. He carried himself stiffly, for he felt he fronted something like a court martial. In cultivated circles Kate's father would have interviewed him alone, but the Kerrs and Dalrymples were primitive, and an injury to one was an injury to the tribe. The moon was full and bright, and when the fire leaped up the others' faces were distinct. Their look was grim, but Alan imagined they would be just.

"I guess you know who I am," Dalrymple began. "When Kate was at Fairmead she went about with you; to the settlement and sports at Elphinstone, and shows like that."



"Yes, sir. Keith and all at Fairmead knew where we went and when we got back."

"At the settlement one afternoon you put Jim Kerr over the hotel rails. Why'd you do it?"

"Oh, well," said Alan, smiling, "Kate had gone to Willows, and did not want Jim to know. He was rather obstinate, and I suppose I got annoyed."

"Kate was not at Willows," Rob remarked.

"I believe you are mistaken," said Alan coolly. "However, it had nothing to do with me, and Jim was not entitled to inquire."

Smoke floated about the group and Rob's mouth curved in a crooked smile. The boy began to see Kate had used him, but he was not going to let her down.

"You looked her up at Brandon," Dalrymple resumed.

"That is so, sir. You were accurately informed; but your inquiries, of course, were justified, and I mustn't pretend I do not see where they lead. Very well, when I arrived at Fairmead, I knew myself a pretty raw tenderfoot, and Kate was kind."

Dalrymple frowned, and Alan went on in an apologetic voice:

"I used the word in its English sense. Kate saw I was lonely, and I suppose, since she is a sort of relation, was willing to be my friend. I thought her a jolly, charming girl. We did go about; I refuse to admit that we ought not."

"But you did not think her the sort of girl you wanted for a wife?"

The smoke blew away, and Alan gave Dalrymple a level glance.

"Since I was James Bryce's hired man, it looked

as if a long time might go before I could support a wife. I don't know if Kate thought it important, and she perhaps did not; but somehow she indicated that if I was satisfied to be her friend, she might so far indulge me. After all, the choice was properly hers. Well, I was not her lover; but I am her friend."

"Just that!" said Rob, and, turning to Dalrymple, resumed: "The lass was ambitious, Hugh. I'm thinking she'd sooner have chosen her husband from Jordan's gang."

Alan looked up sharply. He thought he began to see a light, but Rob stopped, and Dalrymple signed that he might go. When he had fed his horse he asked Latour for supper, and carried his plate and can to a bush a short distance from the group. Sitting in the grass, he ate mechanically, for although his tired body needed food, his brain was occupied.

Rob had given him the clue for which he had vaguely searched. Kate was ambitious, and she knew her charm; but since she was clever, she knew she had not much cultivation. Alan began to see why she had inquired about the rules one used in England; the labored refinement that had begun to mark her talk was significant. At the settlement she had supposititiously started for Willows, but had really meant to keep a rendezvous on the plain, and when her relations thought her at Brandon, Alan had seen her at Winnipeg. Moreover, he had seen Craythorne!

Alan swore. Kate's straining after a refinement that was not hers moved his pity; she would not have the man she had thought to marry ashamed for her. Kate was fine stuff; but all the swine had cared about

was her physical charm. Alan heard a step and turned his head. The moon was bright and he saw Rob studied him with ironical humor.

"I hope Dalrymple and Kerr are satisfied," Alan remarked.

"Their verdict's the Scots *Not proven*. Ye'll need to watch your step."

Alan jumped up. His tin plate clinked against the mug, and the mug capsized.

"Now your supper's in the grass," said Rob.

"Blast the supper! Since I was sacked from the University James Bryce has had me watched, and I've had enough. I want nothing from him, and I stopped because I engaged to stop; but if Dalrymple means to undertake the other's job, I quit. I've done with the Bryces, Griers, Dalrymples. I've done with the blasted clan."

"Hugh is Kate's father, my lad."

"I know, but you are not," Alan rejoined. "I've tried to see the thing from his point of view; I'm certainly not going to bother about yours. Not long since you urged me to carry off Jordan's niece."

"Well, well," said Rob, and gave him a crooked smile. "We are not English gentlefolk, but we have our rules. If ye had run off with the Colonel's lass, ye'd have stayed with her. There's the difference. The foul swine did not stay with ours."

"I expect you don't yet know who he is?"

"Sometimes I'm slow, but, as a rule, I get there," said Rob in a thoughtful voice, and for a moment or two brooded, his eyes fixed on Alan's face. "D'you mean you could enlighten me?"

Alan said he did not. Rob suspected somebody at Oulton, and Alan began to think he knew the man;

but if his surmise were accurate, the fellow was his particular antagonist. Rob's habit was to get there, but Alan hoped to do so first, and he pretended carelessness.

"Oh, well," said Rob, "in the morning Latour and you will follow the *coulée* to Fraser Creek. You ought to be back by noon, when you'll yoke the team and start for the railroad. Keith reckons some stuff from Montreal is at the depot, and Hortense needs supplies. You'll see him about them before you start."

"Then, Dalrymple is going on with the search?"

Rob nodded. "When we have raked all the brush between here and the flag-station, we'll stop."

He went off, and Alan, carrying some hay and a blanket behind a wild-currant thicket, made his bed in the grass.

## XXIV

### SYLVIA KNITS UP THE CLUE

**A**LAN loaded his wagon at the settlement, and after waiting for some goods by the Vancouver train, started for Fairmead. He put up a good load, and although the horses had rested for the night at the livery stable, they were not fresh. In the afternoon he stopped by a pool, and loosing the animals, lay on the bank and smoked. For some time he had not seen Sylvia, and by going a few miles farther he would pass a bluff they used for a rendezvous. If he got there a little before sunset, he hoped she might be about. He hated to entangle her in something like an intrigue, but he could not go to Oulton, and on the whole he thought Sylvia rather liked to baffle her watchful aunt.

By and by a horseman rode along the trail and Alan with some surprise saw it was Kerr.

"Hello, Jim!" he said when the other stopped. "I imagined you were thirty miles off. Where are you going?"

"I've quit," Kerr replied in a moody voice. "I don't take orders from that damfool Rob. If he'd but left Kate alone—he couldn't see he pushed her where he didn't want her to go. Well, I s'pose you know one bright notion was, he'd marry her to you?"

Alan frowned. Jim's candor jarred rather worse

than his former truculence, but he was sorry for the fellow. After all, Jim had loved Kate.

"If Kate knew, she certainly did not approve," he said. "However, since I understand you are emigrating, I wouldn't like you to think I had something to do with her vanishing."

Kerr gave him a queer smile.

"At one time I might have shot you up. I was a fool; but I'm not an obstinate fool all the time, like Rob, and for an Englishman, I reckon you're quite a good sort. Well, I reckon Kate is dead; anyhow, she has done with both of us, and soon as I can make my pack I hit the trail for the Northern Pacific line and Oregon." He pulled out some cigarettes and threw across a packet. "So long, partner!"

The horse plunged, Alan waved good-by, and lighted a cigarette. On the whole, he thought Rob had not taken the proper line with Kate. When domineering older people tried to force one in a particular direction, one mechanically went the other way. Anyhow, Rob did not know all Alan thought he knew, and he hoped soon to satisfy himself that his suspicion was correct. Pulling out his watch, he harnessed the team and steered for the Oulton trail.

Sylvia was not at the bluff, and after he had waited for some time Alan drove on to Fairmead. He was, however, resolved to go back next evening; in fact, until he saw Sylvia he would not return to the camp. He could, no doubt, find work enough to keep him busy at the farm all next day.

When he for the second time reached the little wood, Sylvia waited in the long shadow behind the trees. Although Alan jumped down, she did not get

off her horse. Her smile was sober, and he thought her preoccupied.

"I expect you have found out nothing about Miss Dalrymple?" she said. "I am sorry for her father, but I do not think she's dead."

"Anyhow, she is gone," said Alan. "If, after all, she is alive, I do not think she will come back."

Sylvia's glance searched his face. His brows were knit, and when his horse moved he angrily jerked the bridle.

"You were very fond of her? I don't know if fond is the proper word."

"Yes," said Alan. "To pretend I was not would be shabby. Kate was a first-class pal. She was kind and jolly, and somehow one liked her for her hot, imperious temper. One felt she was never daunted, and she was splendidly generous."

"Can a man love two women at the same time?" Sylvia inquired in a quiet voice.

"Certainly not," said Alan, and resumed with a smile: "Anyhow, so far as the question touches me, it's quite impossible, at one time or another. I believe I'm steadfast, obstinate, if you like."

For a few moments Sylvia looked straight in front, and Alan could not find a clue to her emotions.

"I wonder," she said. "After all, one talks rather vaguely about love. I suppose you know Kate Dalrymple hated me?"

"I admit I noted a sort of antagonism, and was puzzled. The ground, of course, is awkward."

"Your modesty is perhaps the obstacle," Sylvia remarked.

Alan frowned. Sylvia's mood was baffling and he had borne some strain, but he tried for calm.

"Then, if I must be frank, Kate was not jealous because she saw you attracted me. She was willing for me to be her friend, but I must stop there. I can't explain how the limit, so to speak, was fixed; the important thing is, Kate did fix a limit. As a rule, a young man does not fall in love with a girl who has no use for him. He half-consciously waits for a sign it's her part to give. Somehow he knows when he may advance."

"I doubt if you are as modest as I thought," Sylvia rejoined. "The implication is, I signed you to advance."

Alan laughed, a rather strained laugh.

"You must make allowances, my dear. I'm tired, and sorry, and savage, and when one is highly strung one does not use much tact. You see, Dalrymple seems to imagine I was Kate's lover. Then another thing bothers me. I hate to feel I force you to cheat your relations and steal out in the dusk. Sometimes I rebel. The honest line is the best line. I'd sooner go to the Grange and claim you. Jordan would, of course, refuse, but I'd then be justified in carrying you off."

"Now I like you better! Perhaps I was rather nasty, but I have something to bear. All the same, another time when you talked about rebelling we agreed we must not be rash. Perhaps you don't know, but generally I think a girl is less romantic than a man. Well, if we did run away, we could not stop at Fairmead, and I do not know where we could go."

"Canada is large."



"Oh, yes," said Sylvia; "but for a year or two I will have no money, and you admit you have none. I'm not really afraid to be poor, but poverty might force us to separate; and then, of course, we would have run away for nothing. One must be practical, my dear!"

Alan clenched his fist. His impulse was to get on his horse, seize Sylvia's bridle, and start for the frontier; but he knew she was logical and he was not. If he carried out his romantic plan, Sylvia must pay. Besides, he saw another obstacle.

"All in front looks hopeless," he said drearily. "Until I take back my promise, I'm James Bryce's servant; in fact, I'm his bondsman. In a way, the thing's ridiculous, but he holds me for my father's debt."

"And your debt, Alan."

"That is so. I was a fool, and now I must meet the bill. Then, although you had nothing to do with it, I have entangled you."

Sylvia looked about. The sun had set and the light was going, but Alan's face was yet distinct. She thought it thin, his mouth was firm, and for all his youth, she sensed fatigue and strain. She noted his slack pose and dusty, soil-stained clothes. He moved her to pity that went deeper than passion.

"We are young and you claim you are steadfast," she said. "If it's some comfort, I believe I will love you as long as I live. But for a man to be in love is not all, and oughtn't to be all. You have something to do, and I do not want a lover whose only exploit was he ran away with me. You see, we might live for a long time, and in a long time a year

or two is not very much. Then, when we look back, I'd sooner not be ashamed."

Alan smiled, but his smile was not humorous.

"Exactly! You're a charming little philosopher; in fact, I sometimes feel I have but begun to find out the accomplishments you have got. Still, when one is highly strung and savage, philosophy is not as soothing as philosophers perhaps think. Then I don't know if I want to be soothed. I believe I want to break things and storm."

"But you ought to be polite, and when I talk seriously I like people to weigh my remarks; at all events, I really think my lover ought. Well, I doubt if one can, honestly, take back a promise, and since your uncle is respected, I suppose he's just. Unless he had a good object, he would not force you to work for him."

"All I want is to pay the debt he thinks I owe. I'm certainly not calculating on a reward."

"I know your independence, but you are not forced to be a fool," Sylvia rejoined with a smile. "Besides, Mr. Bryce has not much grounds to trust your recent soberness, and he perhaps hopes to see you do not undertake some fresh rash exploit. Since you talked about carrying me off, you are not yet cured."

"By George," said Alan, "to start for the frontier would be an exploit! I could get a fresh team, and if you stole out after dinner, Mrs. Jordan might think you had gone to bed. In the morning we'd be forty miles off, and the best horse at Oulton could not reach the boundary before we were across."

Romantic adventure called and Sylvia was moved.

But she did not like Alan's humor, and the joke was dangerous.

"And then?" she said. "I suppose you would engage for a cow-puncher. You perhaps know something about cattle and can use a rope? However, since you can use a gun, you might help the rustlers shoot cattle barons and United States cavalry. In the circumstances, I might be an embarrassment."

Alan laughed. "In England I saw the rope used at Buffalo Bill's circus. I can drive a plow-ox, but I expect a Montana steer is another sort of beast. In fact, there's my argument. For all your girlish charm, your judgment's cool and sound, but I am, rather obviously, not to be trusted about alone."

"Your engagement stands," said Sylvia. "You must stop at Mr. Bryce's farm. But we began to talk about Miss Dalrymple's jealousy. She was jealous but since it was not for your sake, I begin to see a light. Mrs. Jordan hopes I will marry Craythorne, and Spenser has indicated that he likes the plan."

The blood leaped to Alan's skin and he felt the veins on his forehead swell.

"The unthinkable shabby hound! When he hoped he might marry you, you believe he made love to Kate?"

"Comparisons are awkward, but from Spenser's point of view I have some advantages Miss Dalrymple has not," Sylvia remarked in a queer cold voice. "For all that, she is attractive. Then I expect her temperament is sanguine, and you declared she was generous."

"Kate is a sort of relation. Anyhow, she belongs

to our lot," Alan rejoined. "You see, we are Scots, and who injures one of us challenges the clan. So far, however, I cannot claim I have been a useful champion."

"At all events, you are stanch, and I expect I was nasty. Well, I do not pretend to be noble, and not long since Spenser implied that you were Kate's lover and knew where she had gone. Of course, I knew he exaggerated, but you admitted her father was not convinced, and I was disturbed. I felt you ought not to have given people grounds to doubt you."

"Exaggeration is not the word. The fellow's shabbiness is unthinkable; but the queer thing is, he doesn't seem to know he is shabby. He carries himself with a sort of insolent swagger, as if he were finer stuff than common men."

Sylvia smiled. Alan's calm was not remarkable, but he did not storm, and she imagined control cost him much.

"I believe Spenser has always been indulged," she said. "Some people claim indulgence, and it's possible he really begins to think he is entitled to all he wants. Indeed, until I knew you, I believe I was afraid."

She gave Alan her hand, and his firm grasp was comforting.

"You mustn't again be afraid of Craythorne, my dear. Arrogance like his perhaps carries one some distance, but not all the way, and at length he is up against people who will not indulge him. When he meddled with the Grier-Dalrymple clan he was very rash."

He looked about. Dusk was falling and he pulled out his watch.

"You must go. For a time I suppose we must cheat your aunt, but I think it will not be for long. Somehow I feel a sort of crisis advances. Well, I hope I can play up, and I know your pluck."

"Good night, my dear," said Sylvia quietly.

She started her horse, and Alan, getting on his, lighted a cigarette from the packet Kerr gave him. He must weigh things coolly, and when he fronted Craythorne he must know his ground.

To begin with, Kate was ambitious; she had, for example, refused Jim Kerr, and Alan had noted her curiosity about the Oulton settlers' social rules and her efforts to reach their supposititious standard. The inference was plain; Kate expected to live the sort of life they lived. Had she but carried on a temporary intrigue with one of the young fellows, to bother about refinements in talk and manners would not be logical. Moreover, Alan knew her pride. Kate expected to marry somebody at Oulton; in fact, he was convinced the fellow had promised to marry her.

To reason about it calmly was hard, but when he reckoned with the swine he must know his ground. His horse went smoothly, and Alan, absorbed by his reflections, hardly knew he was on its back, and when wings beat overhead he looked up with a start. Large dark objects moved across the sky: a flock of sandhill cranes; the birds had not yet gone north. Well, he had followed his clue to Oulton before, but now Sylvia, so to speak, had found the other end and joined the threads. Kate hated her jealously, be-

cause she knew her for her rival. She knew Craythorne had pondered marrying Sylvia, and, helped by Mrs. Jordan, might yet carry out his plan. Although Craythorne had not enlightened her, Alan imagined a young woman did know things like that. Well, Kate had resolved to keep her lover.

Alan swore. He knew all he wanted to know, and saw the line he must take. He was not going to inform Dalrymple and Rob in order to exonerate himself. Kate was his pal; her seducer was his enemy and an unthinkable shabby hound. In the circumstances, he himself must reckon with Craythorne.

He braced up and touched the horses with the quirt. They went faster and soon the homestead lights began to shine in front.

## XXV

### IN HOT BLOOD

**I**N the morning Alan saddled a horse and started for Craythorne's farm. The trail he took went by Jim Kerr's homestead, and since he had not been there before, he got down and looked about.

The small house was built of birch logs, notched at the corners. The kitchen occupied all the ground floor, and the stovepipe went up through a room above, and then pierced the roof shingles. There was another room on the second floor, but when the frost was keen it could not be used. A ladder served for staircase, and when one went to bed one crawled through a hole in the kitchen roof. Water must be carried from a well twenty yards off.

For a young frontiersman's homestead, the house was commodious, and Alan thought Jim, as far as his means allowed, had made a first-class job, but he did not see Kate satisfied with a home like that. Now, however, the windows and door were fastened by strong screws. Jim had started for the Pacific slope, fifteen hundred miles off, and Kate was gone for good. Somehow the little house was forlorn and Alan indulged a brooding melancholy.

After a time he got on his horse. He did not want to meet Craythorne in the field, where his hired man would probably be at work, but he hoped to stop him when he came home at noon for food. His

luck, however, was not good, for when he reached the farm the hired man stated the boss had two or three days since gone to visit with a friend the other side of Elphinstone. He thought they meant to hunt coyotes and he expected Mr. Craythorne in the evening. He inquired if Alan would leave a message, but Alan said rather grimly that he must see the boss himself.

Stopping by a creek, he bathed in a rather muddy pool, and, since Hortense had put up some lunch for him, picnicked on the bank. The sun was hot, and to lie in the grass and feel he need not hurry back to his job was something fresh. Rob, no doubt, expected him at the camp, but until he had reckoned with Craythorne, Rob must wait.

Perhaps it was strange, but he was calm. In fact, he enjoyed a dull tranquillity he had not known since the search for Kate began. He did not know what he would say to Craythorne, but it did not matter. If the fellow had helped Kate to steal away, he must force him to state where she was; if Craythorne had not, he must punish the brute for deserting her. Since Craythorne had knocked him out at their previous encounter, Alan admitted he had undertaken an awkward job; but the job was his and his luck might turn. Anyhow, he must wait for evening, and by and by he rode back to Fairmead.

After supper he set off on his feet. A horse might be an embarrassment, and Craythorne's line home cut the Fairmead trail about two miles from the farm. When they met he would order Craythorne to get down, and if he refused, to pull him off his horse would be some satisfaction. All Alan wore



was a blue shirt, a belt, and threadbare overalls. Since the other was quick and hit hard, he must not be hampered by his clothes.

The evening was calm and rather cool. In the west, horizontal pink clouds streaked the pale green sky. But for the rounded bluffs, all the lines were level, and one sensed a wide spaciousness and serenity. The dew had begun to fall and Alan smelt the damp dust and springing grass. In the cool, restful evening he would sooner he had got another task. His proper business was man's primitive business, to cultivate the soil, but he reflected rather vaguely that, after all, man's disturbing passions were as old as his need to labor. Anyhow, since he began to farm he had been forced to fight, and the encounter he waited was his third. He was not keen about it, but he was not afraid. The thing he had undertaken to do must, if possible, be done.

He had hoped to steal out of the house, but Hortense and a teamster had seen him go. Well, so long as they did not see him when he came back, it did not matter much. By and by, where the ground rolled, a wagon jolted down a slope and the driver stopped his team. Alan knew him for a hired man at one of the Oulton farms.

"A pretty good evening," he remarked. "Have the boys found Miss Dalrymple?"

Alan said they had not. He was not going to talk about Kate, and he asked:

"Did you see anybody on the plain when you crossed the rise?"

"I didn't look round," said the other. "Are you waiting for somebody?"

"I thought I might meet up with a fellow I wanted," Alan replied in a careless voice. "Anyhow, I'll shove on a little farther. Good night."

As a rule the plain was lonely, and Alan thought his meeting the teamster strange. He had not wanted people to wonder where he went, and when, ten minutes after the wagon rolled away, he saw Branscombe on a horse he began to be annoyed. Branscombe signed him to stop.

"Have your friends given up the search?" he asked.

Alan said they were going on with it, and he had come back for supplies. Branscombe nodded sympathetically.

"You haven't yet found a clue? I suppose we are not very good neighbors, and perhaps the fault is ours, but I'm sorry for Dalrymple and Rob. Then you yourself must have got a knock."

Alan imagined Branscombe thought him Kate's lover; he understood from Sylvia that Craythorne had implied something like that. Well, he was Kate's pal, and he was not going to pretend he was indifferent.

"Yes; the suspense is hard."

"You are a strong party and I believe Rob indicated that you do not want an outsider's help," Branscombe replied. "However, if an extra man and horse is useful, you might send me word. Now I suppose you are going for a walk, and I must get home."

He started his horse and Alan smiled. Branscombe did not inquire where he went, but he perhaps wondered. He, no doubt, knew Alan's habit was not to go for a walk in the evening, for when

work stopped at Fairmead all were glad to rest. On the whole, he would sooner he had not met Branscombe.

Dusk fell, and sitting down in the brush by a ravine, he lighted his pipe. If Craythorne took the shortest line to his farm, he must pass the spot, and the moon soon would rise. The evening got cold and Alan's clothes were thin, but he was content to wait. After the strain and suspense of the search, a dull reaction had begun.

An hour went, and Alan shivered. The dew was thick and his overalls got wet, but the moon was rising and the spot commanded a wide sweep of plain. By and by he heard a horse's feet and knocked out his pipe. Craythorne was coming, but until Alan jumped from the brush, he must not know somebody waited for him.

A light wind touched the grass and shook the dew from a wild currant's leaves. The cold drops splashed Alan's skin; and then a dead stick cracked and a jack-rabbit went past, a few yards off. Since the animal had not spotted him, Craythorne would not, and the beat of hoofs began to get distinct.

After a minute or two Craythorne stopped his horse and looked about. The bank was rather steep and the trail was in the gloom, but where he stopped he fronted the rising moon. A cartridge-belt was round his waist and he balanced a double-barrel gun across the front of his saddle. Alan pushed back the currant branches, the horse plunged, and Craythorne swore. He lurched, as if he were coming down, but he stuck to the saddle and controlled his horse. Alan thought his hands shook and his look was strained. After all, when Kate vanished the

brute perhaps had got a shock, and his nerve was not firm.

"Hale?" he gasped. "Blast you! What do you want?"

"If you know me, I don't think you need inquire. Anyhow, I'm interlocutor. Where is Kate Dalrymple?"

"I don't know," said Craythorne. "If I did know, I certainly would not tell you."

Alan thought him sincere. His voice was hoarse with passion, and so far as one could distinguish, he frowned savagely. As a rule, Alan reflected, a startled and furious man is not a clever cheat.

"At all events, I expect you know why she went."

Craythorne fought for control. The meddling fool was alone and nobody could support anything he said about the interview. Craythorne was savage, and because he had not long since got a nasty jolt, he was malevolent.

"I don't see your grounds. But what about it?"

"On the whole, I'm glad my business is not to fix the line for you. The convention is, you ought to marry Kate, as you engaged, and her relations might force you to make good; but to give her a husband of your sort would be cruelty. Then, since she has found you out, I expect she'd refuse. Besides, I begin to think she's dead."

Craythorne looked up sharply. His mouth was crooked, and Alan thought his face was haggard. His horse moved as if it sensed his disturbance, but he perhaps unconsciously pressed his legs against the animal's side. Then he braced up and smiled, a queer, scornful smile.

"You take it for granted I did engage——"

"That is so. I know Kate Dalrymple. She has some illusions about gentlefolks, and did not imagine you meant to cheat."

"D—— you!" said Craythorne furiously. "Anyhow, she didn't want you. What have you to do with it?"

"To begin with, I wanted to find out if you had smuggled her off to Winnipeg," Alan replied with ominous calm. "Although your word doesn't carry much weight, I rather think you did not. For one thing, you are not the sort to pay your debt, so long as you can shuffle out of it like a shabby blackleg."

For a moment or two Craythorne said nothing. The moon was on his face, and Alan thought his brows were knit over his half-closed eyes and his mouth was slack. He wondered whether the fellow was tormented by remorse; after all, to think his victim dead must hurt. Alan himself was carried away by a strange, cold vindictive rage. He had not thought he could feel like that. Then Craythorne shifted his hand on the bridle and touched his horse with his boot.

"Stand back!" he said hoarsely. "I have had enough."

"But I have not," said Alan. "You slandered me at Jordan's, and the excuse is as good as another. Get off your horse!"

Craythorne pushed the horse ahead. Alan jumped for the bridle, but he was on the off-side and Craythorne steadied the gun with his right hand. His fingers slid along the barrels and the butt came down on Alan's head. His arm was bent and Alan's soft felt hat softened the knock, for he kept his feet and seized the other's cartridge-belt.

The horse plunged, for a moment Alan's boots were off the ground, and all the weight of his body was on the hand he fastened in the belt. Craythorne, lurching sideways, fell over his shoulder and crashed in the grass. Alan reeled back for three or four yards, and the other was dragged along; then he jerked his boot from the entangling stirrup, and the horse went off.

Craythorne got up awkwardly, and Alan noted that he had somehow stuck to the gun. Fronting each other, they labored for breath. Alan's skin was wet by sweat, but he felt it cold, as if passion had momentarily driven back the blood. Perhaps he remembered this afterwards, for all he really knew was, if one got away he would carry the other's marks for life.

For a few moments he concentrated on his antagonist's face, and then sensing a swift stealthy movement, he shifted his glance and saw Craythorne's hand slip under the gun-barrels. The brute was going to load the gun. When Jordan ruled at Oulton, one broke a breech-loader by pulling a bottom lever sideways, and the action was slow. Alan was four or five yards off, but he moved fast.

A cartridge dropped in the grass, the breech snapped shut, and Craythorne, stepping back, swung up the reversed gun. His hands were near the muzzle, and the barrels and stock were long. Alan jumped for the fellow, and saw the steel plate on the butt shine in the moon. Then he took a smashing knock and Craythorne's figure revolved mistily. His head swam and he staggered, but when he went down he mechanically reached for, and seized, the other's leg.

Craythorne toppled and fell across his back. Alan could not see distinctly; his eyelashes were wet and clogged; but he threw the other off his back and, after they had rolled about, got his knee on the fellow's chest. He struck where he thought a blow most would hurt, and his fist twice seemed to sink in the other's flesh; and then all went dark.

After a few moments he rubbed his eyes and dully looked about. A short distance off, Craythorne tried to get on his horse. Alan thought he had picked up the gun and it embarrassed him, but nothing was distinct, and the horse perhaps refused to stand. Anyhow, Craythorne could not get up. Alan was shaken and dizzy; he imagined his head was cut, for the moisture that went into his eye seemed thicker than sweat. All the same, he started for the spot where Craythorne struggled with his horse. At length the fellow's boot was in the stirrup, and he must not ride off.

Alan lurched for the bridle and fell against the horse's chest. The horse plunged and he was in the grass, under the trampling hoofs. He threw his arm across his head, and thought the animal was gone, although for a moment he dared not look up. Then he saw Craythorne, riding fast, sway about over the horse's neck.

Alan's face was wet by blood. The gun-butt, or perhaps the bottom lever, had cut his head. His back hurt, and he yet seemed to feel the horse's foot on his shoulder. He thought it strange, for a horse, as a rule, is careful not to trample on a fallen man; but Craythorne had, no doubt, driven the animal over his body. Anyhow, the swine was gone, and Alan, crawling down to the creek, drank thirstily

and washed the blood from his skin. By and by he tied his wet handkerchief round his head and awkwardly lighted a cigarette.

His passion had vanished, and although he was battered and shaky, he indulged a sort of ironical humor. He mustn't claim to be much of a champion, but, after all, he had pulled Craythorne from his horse and driven him off the field. When he got his knee on the other's chest he had thought to kill the swine, and Craythorne certainly had tried to load his gun. The queer thing was, he had not stopped his horse and pushed in a cartridge; but perhaps he could not. Alan remembered that he had lurched about as if he was drunk. Well, to know he had risked his life, and the other's, was some satisfaction. He didn't pretend he was logical, but man was not altogether a logical animal. However, he must try to get home, and he got awkwardly on his feet.

When he reached Fairmead nobody was about, and the house was dark. That was something, since he did not want to account for his battered look, and pulling off his boots, he stole, as noiselessly as possible, to his room.



## XXVI

### ALAN GOES TO OULTON

ALAN'S sleep was disturbed; for one thing, his head hurt and his back was horribly sore. He, however, did sleep, and when Hortense beat on his door he looked up with dull surprise. The sun was high and, pulling out his watch, he saw it was nine o'clock.

"The breakfast, it waits for two hours," Hortense remarked. "Me, I have patience, but Bob he must know if you want the team."

"Yes, of course," said Alan. "I ought to have started some time since, and I suppose I must get up."

Hortense went off, but he did not get up. His head ached and he was very slack. The window shade's gentle rattle and the flickering shadows soothed him, and before he knew he was again asleep.

By and by he heard steps in the passage and a peremptory knock. Then the door swung back and Branscombe and two young fellows from Oulton came in. Alan thought he saw Hortense and Bob behind them in the passage. Lifting himself stiffly, he sat up in his bed and frowned.

His overalls, thrown across a chair, were splashed by blood, the water in the washstand bowl was red,

and he imagined the handkerchief round his head carried the same ominous stain.

"Hello!" he said. "This is something of a surprise party."

Branscombe said nothing, but took a rifle from a peg. Turning his back to the window, he pulled the lever and looked down the barrel.

"A 44 Marlin. The barrel's *clean*," he remarked.

"Of course," said Alan; "only a careless slob puts away a powder-fouled gun, and if a farmer's rifle isn't a Winchester, it's a Marlin. People who farm for a living do not use an English Express."

"Where's your cleaning stuff?" Branscombe inquired.

Alan told him, and he took some greasy tow and flannellette from a tin. One of the others joined him and they smelt the rags.

"They have not been used very recently, I think," the young fellow cautiously said. "The oil is the American oil, and when it's fresh from the bottle the smell is rather marked."

"Have you another rifle?" Branscombe asked Alan.

"I believe Keith's is in his room, and a hired man keeps another at the bunk-house. To be polite would be easier if you'd tell me why you want to know."

"Jordan will inform you. He wants you at the Grange and a rig is waiting."

"Jordan is not my boss," Alan rejoined with some temper. "You can present my apologies and state that I will look him up when I'm not occupied."

"He's a magistrate," said Branscombe in a quiet voice. "At daybreak Craythorne's hired man saw

his horse at the corral fence. He went for Martin, and they followed the trail back to Taylor's butte. Craythorne was in the grass, with a bullet hole above his heart."

"Shot? *Murdered?*" Alan gasped, and jumped out of bed.

Martin looked up as if he thought Alan's surprise pretended.

"Spenser certainly did not shoot himself. We found a 44 cartridge *twenty yards off.*"

Alan turned and fronted him. His figure was braced, and he fastened his pyjama jacket mechanically, as if he did not know what he did.

"The butte is two miles from the creek. I didn't hear a shot——"

Branscombe signed him to stop. His glance searched the room and he knitted his brows. Hale had rather obviously not long since engaged in a fight, but it looked as if his antagonist had used an axe.

"I am, I suppose, a special constable, and I do not like my job," he said. "Anyhow, you have got an audience, and ought to be cautious. Our rig is at the steps and you are wanted at the Grange."

Alan beckoned Bob, the Fairmead hired man.

"Start for the camp, and tell Keith and Rob all you have heard." He turned and addressed Branscombe. "If you'll send off your amateur policemen, I'll be ready in five minutes. If you like, post a guard at the door."

The others went, and he occupied himself at the washstand. The safety razor was not yet invented, and he used cold water, but he did not cut his skin, and when he put on fresh clothes he methodically

rolled up a small pack. Craythorne was dead and he might be made accountable. The knock perhaps had dulled his brain, for although he was vaguely daunted he was cool. In five minutes he had made his pack and went calmly down the steps.

When they reached the Grange, Jordan was not there. A young fellow said he had gone to examine the ground at Taylor's butte, and Branscombe fastened Alan in a sort of store-room at the end of the house. When the key jarred in the lock Alan set his mouth. He was a prisoner and he saw Martin sat in the shade under the window. A noise seemed to indicate that another sentry watched the passage. It looked as if the fellows did not mean to let him go!

Yet he was rather savage than weakly afraid. He sprang from stubborn stock, and now he must front a crisis he was perhaps supported by qualities he had not altogether known were his. He reflected that he ought to have got his breakfast and forced Branscombe to wait. Anyhow, to get rattled would not help, and he lighted the last of Kerr's cigarettes.

To know Craythorne was dead was something of a knock, but he did not pretend to be sorry. He must rather try to guess who might have shot the fellow. Kerr had not; Jim had started for Oregon at least forty-eight hours before Alan had met Craythorne. Kate's relations were at the camp on the plain. Alan was baffled, and after pondering moodily he let it go.

By and by Jordan came in. His magisterial duties were not numerous, but long since in the orderly room he had administered summary justice and

learned to know men. He thought Alan bothered, but was not remarkably anxious; in fact, when he got up respectfully he did not look like a guilty man. Yet his head was bandaged and Branscombe had talked about his stained clothes.

"I am sorry I was forced to send for you, but Craythorne was shot and I must investigate," he said.

"I know nothing about it, sir," Alan declared.

"Very well. In the Territories a magistrate's powers are not very strictly defined; he is expected to use discretion, and to some extent combines the office of an English coroner and a Scottish fiscal. The important thing is, if you can support your statement I would be disposed to let you go. If you could, for example, satisfy me you were where you could not have met Craythorne yesterday evening."

Alan pondered. Jordan was not hostile; he perhaps was friendly, but he would be just. Moreover, he must himself carry out all inquiries. The Royal North-West Mounted Police were not numerous, and the prairie belt was wide. As a rule, a sergeant and two or three young constables patrolled a district as large as an English county, and were sometimes sent on exploring excursions across the trackless North. Alan knew Branscombe had studied his room and carried off his overalls, his rifle, and his tin of cleaning stuff. Anyhow, when one had not much talent for cheating, to be candid was the proper plan.

"I cannot satisfy you, and I did meet Craythorne, but not where Branscombe stated he was shot——"

Jordan stopped him. "Then, until full inquiries

can be made, or I get instructions from Regina, I must keep you here. I might advise you to weigh any statement you feel inclined to make."

Alan reflected that Branscombe had warned him to use caution. It certainly began to look as if he had killed their man, but they tried to be fair.

"Since I am a prisoner, I expect the proper line is to reserve my defence," he said.

"On the whole, I agree," said Jordan. "We will send you some food, and if you like, you might in the evening go for a walk with an escort. We do not want to be harsh, and I hope I may soon be able to let you go."

He went off, and Alan brooded. Jordan had talked about Regina, and Alan recaptured his holiday excursion to the little frontier town two hundred miles off. The train got there in the afternoon, and after supper he sat down in the grass across the track.

A clump of willows hid the station agent's hut and baggage shed, and all one saw of the depot was the water tank. Behind the bushes, a frame hotel occupied a corner lot; and then a short row of wooden houses fronted the line. In the background, a shallow lake shone in the sunset. On his side of the track were two or three tall elevators, and the barracks of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, whose guard-room was the jail. All round the spot the grass rolled back, short and smooth, and for the most part level, to the horizon.

The town was quiet, but behind the elevators somebody played the Highland pipes. Alan knew *The Flowers of the Forest*, and in the calm evening the tune was plaintively sweet. Regina was not at

all important, but it was the capital of the Territories, where the R.N.W.M.P. ruled the prairie belt. They were sternly efficient, and now Alan thought about it, the strong guard-room somehow was sinister. In Canada British law went, and the man who killed another was hanged. Yet justice was blind, and sometimes perhaps an innocent man was hanged.

Alan's mouth got tight and he felt his skin was wet by sweat. After all, Montana justice, tempered by popular sentiment and rather ethically than legally just, had some advantages. He, however, dared not dwell on things like that, and getting up, he walked about the floor.

A maid-servant carried in his lunch, and he thought she touched a plate meaningly. When she was gone he moved the plate and saw a small folded note. The ink was smeared as if the writer had been in haste, but he knew Sylvia's hand.

Sylvia declared she knew Alan had not shot Spenser and she expected Jordan would soon be forced to apologize. In the meantime, however, he might rather slavishly carry out his duty, and one or two others were prejudiced. She hoped Alan had been able to send his relations a message, but if he had not, she must contrive to let Rob know. One could trust the clan to see him out, and if he signaled by pushing the shade outside the window, she would get to work. In fact, if he saw any plan by which she could help, he must signal, and the servant would smuggle a note.

Alan smiled, a gentle smile, and a queer emotional thrill contracted his throat and brought a touch of moisture to his eyes. Sylvia was stanch; she was fine stuff, and he did not want her note to be

loverlike. For all her thoroughbred fastidiousness, Sylvia was practical; he pictured her pondering, her head slightly tilted, as a bird tilts its head, and her tender mouth getting firm. Small and light in body, she was not, one might think, a formidable champion, but he knew her pluck and he knew her cleverness. Although she was disturbed, she wrote hopefully, and she saw the proper line.

Alan's look got stern. The Grier-Dalrymple gang would not let him down. One or two, no doubt, had thought he had entangled Kate, but his supposititiously shooting her seducer was his exoneration. Rob, at all events, suspected somebody at Oulton, and would conclude that Alan had spotted the proper man. In a sense, the thing was humorous; because they thought him guilty, he could reckon on their support.

Moreover, they were a formidable lot; big, stubborn Scots frontiersmen whose impulses were yet to some extent primitive. In the old days, their sort had carried off Kinmont Willie from Carlisle castle keep; Janet Bryce liked to imagine their ancestors might have helped. Well, she was not altogether ridiculous; the clan and she herself were the sort to start confidently on a forlorn hope. Then the prison Buccleugh's Borderers broke was built of quarried stone, but the Grange walls were thin shiplap boards.

Alan shrugged impatiently. He mustn't be theatrical and he did not see the clan break Regina jail. The Royal North-West troopers were first-class shots. Anyhow, he was not going to signal to Sylvia. She must not be implicated and his messenger ought soon to make Rob's camp. When Bob arrived Keith would, no doubt, ride for the settle-



ment and telegraph to Winnipeg for a lawyer. He might, indeed, telegraph to James Bryce.

In the meantime, since Sylvia trusted the servant, Alan might risk an answer to her note. The drawback was, he had no writing material, and he wanted to keep the letter. Half the sheet, however, was folded for an envelope, and now he thought about it, when he hurriedly turned back the fold something had fallen on his clothes. Stopping by his chair, he searched the boards and found a thin pencil of the sort supplied with old-fashioned ball programs.

Alan thrilled. Sylvia expected his reply. Moreover, since he imagined they did not use programs at Oulton Grange, the pencil was perhaps a souvenir of her girlish triumph at an Old Country ball. Now she gave it him. He sat down and got to work, although for Sylvia's sake he must be discreet. He pictured Mrs. Jordan's scornful amusement, and its consequences, if by somebody's treachery she were given a loverlike note.

His supper was good, and the servant carried off the folded paper. Soon afterwards Branscombe arrived and suggested carelessly that they might go for a walk. Alan went, but he remarked that his companion stuck closely to his side, and a young fellow strolled along about fifty yards behind. Another apparently exercised a fresh horse. Alan imagined Branscombe was embarrassed, but after a time a prairie hen got up and they began to talk about sandhill cranes and brant geese.

"In the Old Country one uses the double-barrel," Branscombe remarked. "However, I admit to lie up by a sloo and pick off a goose at seventy or eighty

yards with a rifle is pretty good shooting. Then all you hit with the large bullet goes into the bag, and no cripples get away. So long as you hold straight, you can reckon on the shock——”

He stopped, and Alan gave him a smile.

“You forgot, and think you are indiscreet? Well, up to forty yards, if I wanted to be certain, I'd use B-shot and a choke-bore gun. By the way, was Craythorne's gun clean?”

“I don't know if I ought to tell you, but the left barrel was foul.”

Alan looked up sharply.

“The left barrel's choked. As a rule, one mechanically uses the straight-bored right. Craythorne clearly meant to put the concentrated load into his mark. Then he certainly did not shoot after he was hit. I expect you see it's important?”

Branscombe nodded as if he did not want to talk and Alan resumed:

“Very well. I'm a prisoner and we'll let it go. But what about my trial? Has Jordan authority?”

“He could release you, but that is all. If you are tried, the trial must be by jury. I believe he would sooner the police undertook all investigations; you see, Spenser was our man. Sergeant Niven, however, has gone on a long patrol, and Jordan himself may be forced to conduct the inquiry. I understand he's rather annoyed.”

“You are sportsmen,” said Alan. “Well, a stroll under escort is not particularly soothing, and I'd be happier in my room. Let's go back.”

## XXVII

### JORDAN'S INQUIRY

**A**FTER breakfast in the morning Alan heard wheels and horses' feet. The noise went on for some time, as if a number of people arrived, but the stable was behind the house and he could not see who they were. Boards cracked and voices echoed in the passage. Alan wondered what went on, but the visitors were not the mounted police. The R.N.W. troopers were sent out in couples, and he would have heard their spurs jingle and the rattle of rifle-butts. Besides, Sergeant Niven was on patrol in the North. By and by a key jarred in the lock and Branscombe pushed back the door.

"Jordan waits for you," he said. "He's holding a sort of inquest, and I'm sorry I am called for a witness. You will be questioned, and I might suggest that you weigh your replies. On the whole, I doubt if Jordan knows the proper rules, but you will find he's scrupulously fair."

Alan followed the other along the passage and felt himself rather dauntingly alone. But for Sylvia, he had not a friend at Oulton, and if some were frankly revengeful he could not think it strange. When they reached a door at the end of the passage, he hesitated, and to carry himself as if he were indifferent was hard.

Brown-skinned, athletic young fellows and a few

older men occupied chairs and benches in the spacious hall. A group of hired men leaned against the match-boarding, and at one end Jordan was seated behind a table. His look was inscrutable, his pose rather stiff, and his head was slightly tilted back, so that his glance rested levelly on Alan's face. Mrs. Jordan was the only woman in the hall. Her hands were folded on her knee and Alan noted their whiteness, although the color in her cheek was strong. She was very still and did not look up, but he felt her hostility. If Mrs. Jordan were his judge, he knew she would be merciless.

Alan unconsciously clenched his fist. The Oulton settlers must not know he shrank from their antagonistic scrutiny, and when Branscombe indicated a chair, a few yards back from the others, he went forward. Jordan pulled a sheet of paper onto a writing-pad.

"By authority given me at Ottawa, my business is to inquire about the death of Spenser Craythorne," he said. "I had hoped to get some help from the police, but the officers at Elphinstone have been sent on a distant patrol. All interested persons are, I believe, entitled to be here, and if anybody not yet called for a witness can give me useful news, his duty is to keep nothing back. Thomas Vernon!"

Craythorne's plowman advanced and testified. When he last saw his employer alive he was starting for Brant Lake farm. Mr. Craythorne had made a pretty good breakfast and got on his horse as if he was all right, but for some days Vernon had thought him queer. Asked by Jordan what he meant by queer, he replied that when there seemed to be nothing to rile him, he had heard the boss swear, and

felt he himself must watch his step. Anyhow, Mr. Craythorne told him they were going to shoot some coyotes that raided his friend's chicken pens, and fixed when he'd be back. On the day Vernon expected him, Mr. Hale came along and asked for the boss. Vernon said he'd be home in the evening and Hale went off.

When Vernon went to bed the boss had not arrived, but at daybreak he saw his horse by the corral fence, and he went for Mr. Martin. Martin and he took the Brant Lake trail and at the butte found Mr. Craythorne in the grass. He was dead, and, seeing a hole in his jacket, they loosed his clothes. His skin was quite cold, and there was a bullet hole over his heart.

Jordan signed him to step back, and began to make some notes. The door and windows were open; a shade rattled and the fresh wind carried the smell of springing grass into the hall. For a few moments the groups were quiet; and then one or two turned their heads. Alan heard wheels, and soon afterwards Rob, Keith, Dalrymple, and two or three more came up the steps. Alan's heart beat, and the daunting sense of loneliness went. His message had reached the camp and, so far as it was possible, the clan had come to help.

Rob stopped by Jordan's table. He was large and somehow dominant, and he gave the other a sort of impatient glance.

"What's a' this about?" he asked.

Jordan looked up coolly, and for a moment or two resumed his note-making. Then he said:

"You perhaps know Spenser Craythorne was shot?"

"We got some word o' it. He was not shot without good reason."

Mrs. Jordan turned. Although the movement was haughtily languid, her glance was keen. Rob's was hard and openly scornful.

"Can you supply the reason?" Jordan inquired.

"That," said Rob in a grim voice, "is another thing, but if you knew all I suspect, you would not be happier. Anyway, I know naught about the shooting. When we got news o't we were thirty miles off."

It looked as if Jordan pondered; his glance was fixed thoughtfully on the other's face. By inheritance and upbringing they were opposite types, for Jordan's school was the old school of the British Indian army, and Rob was a Scots frontiersman. Yet both were marked by stern sincerity and courage that would not flinch.

"Then, in the meantime, you would not be a useful witness. Why are you here?"

Rob's glance touched Mrs. Jordan and searched the waiting groups.

"We are for the defence. Ye hold a man o' ours, and I'm thinking he's not among friends."

"I am not his judge," said Jordan. "I can, if I am satisfied, discharge him; but if the evidence at this inquiry warrants it, the police will conduct his trial. My business is to find out how Craythorne met his death."

"We ken ye're honest, but the lad has not a lawyer and the evidence must satisfy us."

One or two young fellows moved and glanced at Jordan, as if they waited for a sign. Alan saw one's

eyes sparkle and the blood leap to another's skin. Jordan's look was calm.

"The inquiry is public, Mr. Grier. You are entitled to be present, but not to meddle. I do not want to use the power I've got. Yet I might be forced——"

Rob smiled, a smile that implied he thought Jordan's remark a joke. Then Keith beckoned him and he rejoined his friends. They stood apart from the others, a compact and rather ominous group. When Jordan talked about using force, he did not know the clan.

The inquiry proceeded. Jordan called Martin, and the young fellow stated that soon after day-break Craythorne's man came to his homestead, and they went to look for Spenser. He was in the grass at the butte, and Martin imagined he had been dead for some time. The bullet hole Vernon mentioned obviously accounted for his death. Craythorne's shot-gun was at his side; the left barrel was foul, and the burned cartridge was in the chamber. The grass was trampled by his horse's feet, but, about twenty yards off, they found a 44 rifle cartridge behind a bush."

"Did you not think his using the left barrel important?" Jordan asked.

"Yes, sir. When you put up a shot-gun you mechanically touch the right trigger. The choked left barrel balls the shot. It looks as if Spenser shot to kill."

"Spenser was a good, quick shot. At twenty yards the load would not scatter much. Yet I believe you found no stains of blood."

"Not a spot, sir," Martin agreed.

Jordan signed him to sit down, and Keith stepped forward.

"Since you have not called a doctor, you are perhaps not entitled to take it for granted the bullet wound was the cause of Craythorne's death."

"I did send for a doctor, but I find Maybury is at the Blackfoot reservation and could not get here for six or seven days. Then I am a soldier and have seen men shot. Others who examined the body have hunted moose, and we are agreed. No man, hit where Craythorne was hit, could survive the shock."

"Very well, sir. Shock is instantaneous; the man or animal drops. You see the implication? Craythorne did not use his gun *after* he was hit. His was the first shot. It is possible he provoked the fight."

"Your argument is sound," said Jordan. "I had, of course, noted the point. But you are not justified to claim Craythorne provoked the fight. He was perhaps threatened by the other."

He called Branscombe, who talked in short, staccato sentences. Early in the morning he studied the ground at Taylor's butte. All the others stated was accurate; he could add nothing fresh. Then, acting on orders given them, he, Martin, and Foster went to Fairmead. Hale was in bed, but they examined the 44 Marlin rifle in his room. The barrel was clean, but he thought it had not been rubbed out recently. They asked for the cleaning rags, now in the tin box on Colonel Jordan's table. The oil was an American oil, and when freshly used had a pungent smell. The smell on the rags was faint.

Hale's head was bandaged; the handkerchief was crusted by blood, and his clothes, which they carried



off, were splashed. The water in the wash-bowl was red. When told Craythorne had been shot he jumped out of bed. Branscombe thought him startled, shocked perhaps. He said, "The butte is two miles from the creek. I did not hear a shot." Branscombe had met him near the creek the evening before. He was on foot and Branscombe was nearly sure he did not carry a rifle.

"Hale's head is yet bandaged," Keith remarked. "May I ask if the wound is a gun-shot wound?"

Branscombe turned to Jordan and, seeing him nod, replied:

"Not at all. I afterwards helped him wash the cut. I do not want to be humorous, but when I studied his clothes and the room at Fairmead it looked as if his antagonist had used a battle-axe."

Jordan made some notes, and then said to Alan:

"At present, my business is something like an English coroner's, and since you are not yet accused, I am entitled to question you. Your statements will be recorded."

Alan got up. Below the fresh handkerchief his skin was rather white, but he carried himself firmly. He saw Mrs. Jordan studied him, and somehow he knew the cold, haggard woman for his worst enemy. Branscombe, sitting not far off, rested his head in his hand, and when Alan glanced at him, it looked as if he tried to apologize. The young fellows in the middle of the hall were frankly hostile; he imagined they rebelled against Jordan's fairness and would take another line had they but got his post.

Yet he was not going to be daunted. Their antagonism fired his blood. The fellows were Craythorne's sort, loafing young sportsmen who refused

to labor, but claimed a sort of feudal right to seize the best there was; Craythorne, for example, had seized bonnie Kate. At the University, he to some extent had used their rules and copied their rather insolent carelessness. Now he supposed he was moved by feelings inherited from Scottish peasants, for he hated the lot, and when he studied the group at the back of the hall he knew his own people.

A day or two since Dalrymple had doubted him; now the big carpenter's smile was friendly, and Keith gave him an encouraging nod. Rob and Kerr waited as men wait for a fight to begin, but he knew they reckoned him the clan's champion. Moreover, they somehow implied that the clan would see him out. His hesitation vanished, and he turned to Jordan with cool politeness.

"If I am not yet accused, I imagine I am suspected, sir. You know I asked for Craythorne, and two of your people met me on the trail. Well, unless one is clever, to cheat does not pay. On the evening of the shooting I went to look for Craythorne."

Jordan looked up from his notes and Alan was conscious of a sort of movement in the hall. His bold statement had roused his audience to keener hostility, but Rob seemed to signal that he took the proper line.

"You had an object for wanting to see Craythorne?"

"That is so. I believe he not long since publicly slandered me."

Jordan's look was inscrutable; Mrs. Jordan was very quiet, but Alan knew them interested. Any-

how, he knew where to stop, and he was not going to indulge their curiosity. He must perhaps account for his resolve to meet Craythorne, but nobody must imagine he had fought to revenge Kate.

"It is not important," he went on. "I waited for Craythorne where the trail crosses the creek. Since we fought about some hay a year ago we have jarred. Anyhow, I was on foot and when I ordered him to get off his horse he struck me with his gun. I pulled him off the horse, and when he got up he tried to load the gun."

"This was at the *creek*?"

"Close to the crossing. If you study the ground on the left bank, you will find the mark. I expect you will find the cartridge Craythorne dropped."

"Then you did not allow him to load the gun?"

"I didn't want to be shot," Alan replied.

He narrated the fight, and resumed: "Branscombe helped me wash and bandage my head, and I dare say will tell you about the cut. I believe I was struck by the gun's bottom lever. Anyhow, I was knocked out and Craythorne got on his horse. When I was able to get up I went home to bed, and until Branscombe arrived in the morning, I believed Craythorne had reached his farm."

Jordan indicated that he might sit down, and when he had made some notes he cogitated. All was very quiet, until Keith got up.

"Hale was met by two people. One is nearly sure he did not carry a rifle. What about the other?"

"He does not know," said Jordan. "He states he watched his restless team and the light was going."

"Ye have got an honest tale, and ye can search the ground by the creek," Rob remarked. "The lad was not at the butte. We ask for his release."

"I must refuse," said Jordan. "My report goes to Regina and in three or four days I hope to get instructions. In the meantime, Hale must stop at the Grange. I thank the witnesses. The inquiry is over."

He got up. For a moment Rob hesitated, and then Keith touched him, and signaling Alan, he went to the door. Alan did not altogether know what his gesture implied, but it was encouraging. Then Branscombe advanced and escorted him along the passage to his room.

## XXVIII

### COUNCILS OF WAR

JORDAN pushed a letter across the table to his wife, and got up as if he was glad to finish an awkward job. Crossing the floor, he pulled the window curtain farther back and leaned against the casement frame. For the most part of the afternoon he had been occupied by arrangements for Craythorne's funeral, and when he got back he had composed a letter to the young man's relations in England.

The sun was setting, and Sylvia, at the other end of the veranda, had put down her book. Her pose was braced and when Martin, advancing with a measured step, passed the bottom of the steps and gave her a humorous salute, she did not look up. Jordan doubted if she saw the young fellow. Martin was doing sentry go, and in about five minutes he would be back. Jordan frowned. The dreary business jarred, but he stood for the Dominion Government, and he knew his duty.

"The letter is good. In the awkward circumstances, I think you strike the proper note," Mrs. Jordan remarked.

"It was not altogether my object," Jordan rejoined. "I believe I wrote as I felt. I *am* sorry, and to some extent I am ashamed. Spenser's people

trusted me and I rather persuaded them to send him out to us. I cannot claim I have justified their trust."

"Spenser was my relation, but I do not think we are accountable. The trouble was, the boy was flesh and blood. Well, I suppose you did not like my sitting out your inquest, but I did not do so from morbid curiosity. I had, of course, begun to see a light, and a remark of Grier's was illuminating. He declared Spenser was not shot without good reason. Although your reserve is rather nice, the trouble the letter cost you indicates that you guess the reason."

Jordan frowned. His wife was cleverer than he, but sometimes he came near to hating her cynical hardness. She had put on evening clothes, and he saw that she got very thin. Her face was pinched, but she had frankly rubbed on the vivid color over her cheek-bones. Millicent did nothing apologetically.

"The girl is handsome. For all that, Hale was not Spenser's rival."

Mrs. Jordan agreed. George was not remarkably keen, but he was not a fool.

"Yes. Hale is young and, I expect, theatrical. He perhaps felt his shooting Spenser would vindicate the honor of his clan. Our neighbors at Fairmead are, of course, rather a primitive lot."

"We do not know he did shoot Spenser, but from his folks' point of view he perhaps had some grounds. Since you like frankness, it looks as if Spenser thought the girl good enough to be his mistress, but not to be his wife."

"I expect men of our sort thought something like that in, for example, Babylon," Mrs. Jordan remarked.

"Then if we are not popular on the plains, we mustn't grumble."

The light wind touched the curtains and Jordan heard a step. Martin kept his sentry round. Jordan did not know if it was necessary, but the Griens were back at Fairmead and he must run no risk. His wife's remarks rather annoyed him and looked purposeless, but he imagined she led him somewhere.

"You ought not to have placed your settlement where you must compete with Presbyterian farmers," she said. "On the whole, however, you have ruled our young bloods with tact and firmness, and have not much cause to apologize for them. Since your school was the Indian army, the queer thing is, to some extent, you yourself are a Puritan."

"After all, one or two who fought in the Mutiny were prayer-meeting men, but we acknowledge them first-class soldiers. In America, Stonewall Jackson was something of their type, and I believe he declared that the most beautiful things he knew were the lancet windows at York Minster. I don't know if Wolfe was a Puritan, but when he stole up the St. Lawrence to seize Quebec he recited Gray's Elegy to the officers in his boat. Then, of course, Cromwell smashed the licentious cavaliers."

Mrs. Jordan laughed. "Comparisons are awkward, George! However, your modesty is notorious, and I mustn't joke. What are you going to do about your prisoner?"

"He must be sent for trial. I myself do not think him guilty, but when I weigh the evidence, I dare not let him go. Since Sergeant Niven is on patrol

and nobody is at the Elphinstone post, I must wait for instructions from Regina."

"If he were tried at Elphinstone, the farmers would probably sympathize," Mrs. Jordan remarked in a thoughtful voice. "Still, I expect we would have something to do with calling the jury."

"You do not suggest that I should try to *pack* the jury?"

"Not at all, George. I know your uprightness," said Mrs. Jordan with a bleak smile. "Yet my relation was shot, and the proper man must be punished. At Regina, Hale would be tried on the evidence, and the verdict would not go by popular feeling. You see, the Griers' friends are numerous, but ours are not."

Jordan pondered. Millicent was revengeful, and hard and keen as steel; moreover, she had perhaps some other grounds to hate the prisoner. Yet, in a way, he agreed. His business was to see that sentimental favor and prejudice did not work for, or against, the accused.

He heard a slight noise and looked about. Martin again tramped his sentry round. The steps got farther off, and when all was quiet Jordan saw his wife waited.

"The police will probably fix the place for the trial, and I hope an escort from Regina will soon arrive. In the meantime, I have sworn three or four of the boys for special constables."

"Our house is not a jail," said Mrs. Jordan with a touch of haughtiness. "Then Hale's being here might excite Sylvia's sympathy. I suspect a rather dangerous attraction. I, of course, had hoped she might marry Spenser, but that's done with. If Hale



stops at the Grange his friends might break his prison. They are a resolute lot, and at the inquest I studied the red man. My notion is he indulged you, but was quietly amused. Since he did not challenge your refusal, I think he considered another plan."

Jordan now saw where she had meant to steer him, but on the whole he agreed. Anyhow, he knew Red Rob.

"The Griers are resolute. I doubt if they would venture to carry off their relation, but it's possible."

"You ought not to risk it. The red man is plotting something. Send Hale to Regina and do not wait for orders. He ought to start in the morning."

Jordan got up. "I will see Branscombe. If we gave the party breakfast at six o'clock, they ought to get the train in the afternoon."

He went off and Mrs. Jordan smiled. To move George was rather hard; he liked to weigh things, but when he did move he moved fast. She went to the veranda. Sylvia's chair was by the wall and her book lay on the boards. As a rule, the girl did not carelessly leave things about, and Mrs. Jordan picked up the book. The evening was not dark and in the northwest the sky was yet faintly touched by green and red. She felt the cool freshness of the dew and smelt wild mint. The spacious, shadowy landscape was austere beautiful.

Mrs. Jordan mused. She sprang from a long line of English country landlords, her temper was imperious and her nerve firm, but she knew the Canadian winter, and sometimes the wide plains were daunting. The Northwest was a stern country. In it only the frugal and laborious might hope to make

good, and the Oulton colonists were frankly not like that. Then they had awkward competitors.

She hated the Griers and Dalrymples for their industry, since so long as her folk refused to use their parsimonious rules she knew the Scots would win. After all, George's object was good, and to see him beaten would hurt. Then, but for Hale, Spenser might have married Sylvia and would not have got entangled by the prairie girl. He was her relation, and by and by Sylvia ought to inherit a useful sum. She hated the boy who had wrecked the scheme. As a rule, Mrs. Jordan left people she did not like scornfully alone. The trouble was the Griers refused to leave her alone, and to be baffled by rude farmers was humiliating.

Moreover, she honestly believed Hale did shoot Spenser, and the fellow must take his punishment. Mrs. Jordan argued like a Louis XVI marquise. She did not altogether claim that Spenser was entitled to seduce the other's relation, but she did feel that for the fellow to revenge the injury and escape the consequences was unthinkable.

She heard Martin's even step. His figure cut the sky; and then she looked the other way. Behind the trees, where the gloom was thick, a horse's feet beat the turf.

"Who is that, Rex?" she called.

Martin stopped. "I don't know, ma'am. Cheevers' man perhaps, although Corlet's teamster was at the stable. Anyhow, the fellow is going away, and my orders are to halt any stranger who steers for the house. I don't suppose Colonel Jordan really expects the Griers to hold us up?"

"They are a queer lot," said Mrs. Jordan. "You ought perhaps to be watchful, Rex."

Martin moved on. The noise of the drumming hoofs got faint, and Mrs. Jordan went to the house.

After supper at Fairmead, Dalrymple, David Kerr, and Rob joined Keith in Alan's office. Work at the farm must be resumed as soon as possible, and Keith had been occupied for the afternoon. Now they must take council, and although each expected to review arguments he had heard before, a line of action must be fixed.

"We have got to see the boy through with it," Dalrymple remarked. "A few days back, I reckoned his joining up to help us search was bluff, and I waited for him to give himself away; but when he fixed the other fellow I knew I was after the wrong man. The boy's all right, and I'm sorry, although he did what I ought to have done."

Keith, lighting his pipe, admitted Hugh was logical. Since Alan had gone to look for, and had supposititiously shot, Kate's betrayer, his innocence was obvious. When Rob admitted he had suspected somebody at Oulton none doubted Alan was the girl's romantic avenger.

"You were in camp," Kerr said to Dalrymple. "In a way, the job was Jim's, and I can't boast about my nephew. All he did was to pack his turkey and pull out for Oregon."

"You take it for granted Alan did shoot Craythorne?" Keith remarked.

"Sure thing," said Kerr. "Don't you?"

Keith doubted, but he resolved to experiment. As Hugh and David reasoned, a farmer juryman would probably reason.

"Two people met Alan, and neither noted if he carried a rifle; one, in fact, thought he did not. A 44 Marlin is a pretty conspicuous object."

"How'd he get his head cut?" Dalrymple inquired.

"He told us. You saw the grass was trampled at the creek, and although we did not find the cartridge, one of Jordan's boys might have picked it up. If Alan stopped Craythorne at the creek, he did not hold him up again at the butte. Craythorne had a horse."

"Oh, pshaw! The boy had got to pitch a tale. If you hold up a man and put him out, it's murder, and it won't help you to plead there was a fight. We'll leave it at that. If the boy is tried at Elphinstone, we might get him off, but I don't know. I guess Jordan's lady will help pick the jurymen."

"You can challenge a jury," said Kerr. "If he goes up for trial, we want a first-class lawyer. The Banker ought to know."

"James Bryce will know in the morning," Keith replied. "I expect the telegram I sent to the settlement arrived after the bank was shut. I have allowed for the difference between Middle-West and Quebec time."

"If Hale is tried at Elphinstone, he runs some risk; if they send him to Regina, I reckon he's done with," Dalrymple remarked. "The folk there have some traffic with Montana, and know all about the cattle barons and rustlers' fight. They're not going to have free shooting on their side of the boundary. Your lawyer tells them they have got to prove the accused's guilt; they sort of argue that he oughtn't

to be accused. If he starts trouble in Canada, they'll fit him with a rope."

"That's so," Kerr agreed. "We must get on a move."

Rob smiled. "I would not hurry ye. But Alan must not be tried, and I have friends in Montana. We'll need to see him across the boundary before Jordan gets the police."

"The troopers would shoot, and they shoot straight," said Keith. "If we try to stop them we are outlaws and they'd search all Canada for us. We might steal across the frontier, but all we have got is our land and implements, and one cannot carry off one's farm."

"Then you'd let Jordan's lady hang our man?" said Dalrymple scornfully.

"No," said Keith. "That's another thing."

Rob stopped them. "Keith's no more a fool than me. Quit disputing. Our job's to find a plan. If I could but get a word with the bit lass at the Grange——"

For some time they cogitated. They must be satisfied their plans would work, but all they saw had drawbacks. The problem was to hold up the Grange without being forced to shoot. Yet they dared not wait. Since the police would soon arrive, Alan must be carried off on the following night. By and by Hortense broke in on their deliberations.

"I am at the well, and I hear one who comes from Oulton *vent' à terre*."

"Riding hell for leather," Keith translated.

He went to the door, and the rapid beat of hoofs sharply pierced the dark. A minute or two afterwards Sylvia ran up the veranda steps.

"Send somebody for my horse," she gasped. "Two of you are Alan's relations."

Dalrymple knocked out his pipe and got up. Rob fetched her a chair.

"The others, in some degree, are kin. Anyway, all are his friends."

Sylvia pulled off her riding gauntlets and got her breath. Her eyes sparkled and her color was high. The big men waited calmly. She knew they would not hurry her, and she remarked Rob's faint, humorous twinkle.

"Very well," she said. "I thought you ought to know Alan Hale will be sent to Regina soon after daybreak tomorrow."

"Ye're a kind and brave young lady," Rob remarked. "I'm sorry to contradict ye, but I think ye wrong."

His quiet confidence was soothing, and Sylvia liked Keith's calm, friendly glance. Dalrymple's face was lined and his large mouth grimly set; Kerr's look was rather woodenly inscrutable. Sylvia had not expected them to chatter excitedly.

"You see, you must carry Alan off tonight?" she said.

"Just that!" agreed Dalrymple. "Does your leddy aunt ken where ye have gone?"

Keith smiled. As a rule, Hugh talked like a Canadian, and sometimes Rob's English was almost cultivated. Their talking like Scots was ominous.

"On the whole, I think not," Sylvia replied, as coolly as possible. "Her maid saw me go to my room, and I hope nobody saw me steal out. People were coming and going; the party must start in the morning, and all were occupied——"

"Can you draw us a plan of the house?" Keith inquired.

Sylvia hesitated. Her uncle had indulged her, and to feel she repaid his kindness by treachery hurt. When she stole away from the house she had obeyed an impulse, and had not seen all the step implied. Yet she must be logical, and since she meant to save her lover, she must bear the consequences. She took the pencil Keith supplied and got to work. In the meantime Dalrymple said to Keith:

"Then, ye'll take the road with us?"

"Did you doubt?" Keith rejoined. "If it's some comfort, I hope to go all the way."

The plan Sylvia drew was not remarkably good, but it indicated the passages, doors, and rooms, and when the others had examined it Rob inquired:

"Could ye creep into the house and open yon door at the back for us?"

"I might," said Sylvia, and the blood leaped to her skin. "But I'd hate to do so. Colonel Jordan is my uncle. And he's a magistrate."

"The other's your Joe, and ye are not the first who has been forced to make a choice like yon. If we break the door, somebody might be shot."

Sylvia saw the men waited. They refused to urge her, but they were going to seize the Grange, and if she did not help, blood would be shed. Besides, there was no use in pretending: Alan was her lover, and if he was sent to Regina he might be hanged.

"I will open the door for you," she said.

Rob pulled out his watch and touched Kerr.

"We start in two hours. Ye'll have time to send a message. I want Jake and Walter Grey."

"I'll go myself, and fetch Frank Paterson," Kerr replied.

He went off with Rob and Dalrymple. Keith turned to Sylvia.

"You, perhaps, would sooner wait for us? Hortense will give you some coffee and biscuits, and until we are ready to start you will not be disturbed."

Sylvia saw he was sympathetic. In fact, she thought he saw that when she joined his folk she joined them for good. Then, after all, she might not be able to creep into the house, and if the door must be broken, she would sooner be outside with Alan's rescuers. So long as nobody was hurt, she rather hoped they must force the door.

In the meantime Rob stopped Hortense and ordered her to put up a quantity of food. Then he said:

"Kate left some clothes in the house. Sort out the stuff ye think a girl might need for a journey, and make a small pack."

He sent Keith for the hired men, and for a time all at Fairmead but Sylvia were occupied. Sylvia brooded in Alan's quiet room.



## XXIX

### HELD UP

COLONEL JORDAN put down the *Field* and pulled out his watch. The big basement stove was out of action for the summer, but the night was rather cold and a cordwood fire burned in the open grate in the hall.

"Twelve o'clock!" he said to his wife. "Are you not going to bed?"

Mrs. Jordan, in an easy-chair across the fireplace, signed Branscombe to move a coffee-pot.

"Presently, George. I promised to give Rex some sandwiches when he finishes his sentry round. Our servants are independent Canadians and refuse to be useful after dinner."

"When you are not about, I imagine they call it supper. On the plains, one dines, democratically, at noon. However, if the coffee is hot, I, and perhaps Jack, will take a cup."

Mrs. Jordan gave them coffee, and Jordan pulled out some English cigarettes.

"I suppose we are extravagant and Virginia tobacco is not much better for twice crossing the Atlantic, but the London manufacturers supply a blend that suits my old-fashioned taste. However, I exaggerate, for the cigarette is recent, and I remember the C.O.'s wrath when the first was smoked at an Indian army mess. He sent his case down the

table and ordered the offender to take a Burmese cheroot."

"If we farmed on economical lines, sir, we would smoke the black Quebec stuff, or the tin-flag plug."

"Canadian farming, as we practise it, is not economical," Mrs. Jordan remarked. "My husband claims it is cheaper than renting an English country house and shooting; but sometimes I doubt."

Jordan looked round.

"Did you hear a board in the kitchen passage crack?"

"I heard nothing, but I was getting a light," Branscombe replied. "However, since I'm corporal of the household guard, I'll investigate."

"I'd sooner you did not," said Mrs. Jordan. "Your hired man and another have been about all evening, and our parlor-maid is, no doubt, stealing off to bed. Coralie tries to play up to her romantic name, and your watchfulness might, so to speak, be misconstrued."

Branscombe laughed and turned to Jordan.

"If you are tired, sir, I think we can undertake to hold the fort. Day breaks in about four hours, and I imagine you don't really expect a rescue-party."

"I know our neighbors, Jack. On the whole, I like them; but for all their industry, one gets a hint of qualities Bret Harte pictured in his forty-niners. Since Riel was hanged for rebellion the Northwest has been as safe for sober folk as the Old Country, and our business is to keep it so. I mustn't prose, but freedom and security are possible only where you respect the law."

"Yes, of course," said Branscombe. "Yet, in some particular instances one might feel the law did

not supply a remedy, and the Western pistol duel had advantages."

Jordan shook his head. "We are British, and must stick to the rules we know. Besides, if you begin to tolerate violence, you don't know where to stop. I myself do not believe Hale did shoot Spenser, but the evidence forces me to send him for trial. However, where is Vivian? He ought to have reported a few minutes since."

They went to the door. The night was rather dark and all was quiet.

"Lisburn is next on guard, and has, no doubt, begun his round," said Branscombe. "I'll inquire about Vivian."

He vanished in the dark, and when he came back his look was puzzled.

"Vivian is not on this side of the house, and when Lisburn took over was not on his beat. Although the boys rather thought our keeping watch a joke, I hardly think he's gone to sleep. Anyhow, Lisburn will look out for him and I am prisoner's guard."

After waiting for a minute or two, they went back into the house. Neither was disturbed, and Branscombe himself thought Jordan's posting the sentries something of a joke. Then he saw Mrs. Jordan move abruptly and Jordan look round. The inner door, opening to the kitchen passage, swung back and two masked men advanced.

Branscombe jumped for the glass-fronted cupboard in which the guns were kept, but one of the strangers got there first and shoved a rifle-barrel against his chest.

"Back to the chair by the wall, and sit down!" he said.

Branscombe sat down. He did not know if the man would shoot, but he was big and muscular, and one could not seize him for the long rifle. His confederate, carrying an iron crowbar, menaced Jordan. Their faces were covered by thin, black material, pierced for their eyes, and their look was rather grotesque than alarming. Yet Branscombe noted their alert, braced poses, and knew them determined. From the strangers' point of view, his helplessly fronting the cupboard where beautiful English guns and Express rifles were stacked was probably humorous. Since Jordan had posted sentries, the garrison ought logically to be armed, but one hated to be theatrical, and Branscombe and the boys had rather indulged the old fellow.

Jordan's face was red. He carried himself stiffly, as if dignified control was hard; but the stranger balanced his crowbar and the sharp point was but two or three inches from the Colonel's stomach.

"If ye're wise, ye'll bide where ye are, sir," the man remarked.

Mrs. Jordan's skin was white. Branscombe knew fear had nothing to do with it, and her eyes shone with scornful anger. Perhaps she thought the strangers' attention fixed, for she got up noiselessly, and Branscombe's heart beat. If Madam could reach the guns she would not hesitate to shoot, and he hoped her pluck was not better than her aim. Then a fresh man jumped from the passage and seized her arm.

Mrs. Jordan screamed, but Branscombe imagined the cry was not to be accounted for by alarm or pain. The note was sustained and piercing, and was, no doubt, calculated to warn the garrison. Jor-

dan seized his guard's crowbar, and was flung against the wall.

"Nobody will hurt the leddy; but ye will not meddle," remarked the stranger, and signed his confederate. "Stop the besom!"

The fellow shoved Mrs. Jordan firmly into a chair and tore a window-curtain from its rod.

"If ye force me, I'll twine the stuff roon' your head," he warned her. "Since I'm no' a leddy's maid, ye had better be quiate."

Branscombe did not know if the fellow was consciously humorous, but Mrs. Jordan stopped. It, however, looked as if her scream had carried, for in the dark passage somebody crashed against a wall, and a noise indicated that a spirited fight began. Steps echoed in the staircase well, and somewhere outside the house a rifle exploded. Then Branscombe saw two fellows with rifles slung behind their shoulders kept the veranda door, and he imagined one or two more occupied the steps. The attack was cleverly planned, but he did not see how the first two had got into the house.

In a few moments the noise stopped, and Jordan haughtily fronted his guards.

"Since I expect you know I do not keep much money at my house, you might state what you want."

"We want the key of your prisoner's room."

"I certainly will not give you the key. I warn you that you will pay for this lawlessness."

"You reckon you could spot us without our masks?"

"I hope to try," said Jordan. "Your talk, and in particular your intonation, gives me a useful clue."

The other laughed. "I doubt ye'll be baffled,

Colonel. In a day's ride, ye'll find a dozen farmers, who, if they thought it helped, would speak good Scots. All are known for sober, prosperous folk. Where ye find a farmer whose farming does not pay ye'll note he uses Oxford English. But we are waiting for the key. If ye would sooner not give it up, ye might tell us where it is."

"I will not tell you. In Canada, housebreaking is punished, and to help a prisoner escape is a grave offense."

"Aweel, if we cannot persuade ye, we must spoil your bonnie door," the other rejoined, and signaled the men on the veranda. "Two forward. Take the crowbar. Ye ken where our man is."

Two went along the passage. The others heard them stop, and the noise of splintering wood echoed in the hall. A door crashed, and for a minute or two all was quiet. Then the men came back, with Alan and Sylvia a yard or two behind. Alan's head was bandaged, but his look was cool; Sylvia's was highly strung and her skin was almost colorless. Jordan gave her a swift glance, and looked the other way. Mrs. Jordan laughed, a hard, scornful laugh.

"Now I understand!" she said. "You smuggled your lover's friends into your uncle's house? Well, I suppose you decided to follow him, because you knew I would soon find out."

Sylvia turned. The blood flushed her face, but her look was hard.

"Yes; I know my shabbiness, but you forced me to cheat." She turned to Jordan. "You were kind and I am sorry. All the same, Alan did not shoot Spenser, and I did not see another way. After a time perhaps you'll forgive me. Now I'm going."

"But you cannot go," said Jordan. "Stop, my dear. If these d—— fellows will leave us for a few moments——"

"There is no use in talking. Good-byl!" said Sylvia in a low, hoarse voice.

She went to the door. Alan hesitated. He must join Sylvia, but he hated to steal away and leave his rescuers. One pushed him after her.

"Your place is with the lassie. We're not needing ye."

Alan went. In the dark at the bottom of the steps he saw three or four men and horses.

"Help the lady up," said one. "It's a long road to the frontier and time we were off."

Alan seized the horse's bridle and touched Sylvia. A faint reflection from the hall shone down the steps and he saw her head was bent.

"All has happened so fast, I hardly know where I am; but it looks as if I must carry you off," he said.

"If you would sooner not, somebody will perhaps ride with me to the railroad," Sylvia rejoined. "You see, when I went down the steps I knew I could never go back."

Alan laughed, a soft, triumphant laugh.

"My dear," he said, and lifted her strongly on the horse.

"Hit the trail!" somebody ordered. "You have got to hustle, boys."

Bridles and stirrups rattled; pounding hoofs beat the turf. The horses went nobly and the fresh wind whipped Sylvia's face. Now they were off, doubts and remorse vanished. She was young, speed and adventure thrilled her, and she indulged a swift reaction. Willows loomed in front, and she knew the

little creek's bank was high, but the leader did not swerve and she let her horse go. The horse rose, thin branches cracked; Sylvia swung back, and they were across.

"*She is won; we are gone!*" she quoted, and resumed with a laugh: "I expect your romantic aunt would approve your Lochinvar's exploit."

"Janet would probably claim he was our relation. However, my part in the exploit was not romantic. The clan broke my prison and put me on a horse."

"You ought to play up," Sylvia rejoined. "Still, to some extent, you are English, and to be theatrical is not good form. Then, when one thinks about it, I rather ran away with you."

"Watch out for the badger hole," shouted a man in front.

When the beat of hoofs echoed in the hall the man who guarded Jordan laughed.

"They're away! The house is ours, sir, but nobody is hurt, and if ye are reasonable, we will not inconvenience ye much. For the rest o' the night we'll just round your household up in your lady's parlor. Ye will be pleased to step along the passage, ma'am."

Jordan shrugged. The situation was humiliating, but to storm and threaten would not help. The fellows had, no doubt, seized his sentries and fastened the hired men in the stable. He went to the passage door. Mrs. Jordan stopped.

"I will not move," she declared. "Your society is not at all delightful, but you will at least be forced to stay and guard us in the hall."

The masked leader whistled and two more came up the steps.



"Take the Colonel along," he ordered, and, when Jordan was pushed into the passage, crossed the floor. "Ye are surely going, ma'am."

He took her firmly in his arms, and Mrs. Jordan knew the bitterest humiliation of her life. There was no use in struggling; the brute was horribly strong, and when they went up two steps he did not stumble. Putting her down where a beam of light shone from a door, he laughed.

"It was no' my choice, ma'am, and I have carried a bonnier lass."

Steps echoed in the passage and a fresh group advanced. Masked guards pushed Mrs. Jordan, Branscombe, and two or three young fellows into the room, and the leader threw some articles on the table.

"Your maid-servants are locked up safe, and until we call ye at daybreak ye'll be nice and quiate," he said. "There's a deck o' cards and a draught-board in case ye find the time is long."

The door was shut, the lock jarred, and the smell of a sulphur match indicated that somebody in the passage light his pipe. Vivian, the sentry, looked about and gave Jordan an apologetic smile.

"We are all here, sir, but for Lawrence, and I believe he's fastened up in the stable with your hired men. I was passing the willow clump when somebody in the grass grabbed my leg."

"Exactly!" said Jordan. "I expect you thought me an old fool and did not bother to keep watch. Your luck was not much better, Lisburn, although you did fire a shot."

"It was not, sir," the other agreed awkwardly. "I saw a sort of shadow by the cordwood pile, and

challenged. Getting no answer, I crept up to the pile, and somebody jumped on my back. The rifle went off, and two fellows rolled me in the grass. Well, I suppose we must wait until they let us go. Would you like a game of draughts, sir?"

Jordan's reply was explosive, and Mrs. Jordan began to laugh. Her highly-strung, ironical merri-ment was somehow disturbing.

"Our neighbors are too strong for us. They have beaten us economically, and they have beaten us at a job you ought to know."

"I get old," said Jordan moodily. "Perhaps I was too hopeful, but I did my best. In the morning I will make inquiries, but I expect to be baffled. The police may find out something when Sergeant Niven gets to work."

He brooded. Branscombe went to the window and as noiselessly as possible pushed up the sash. There was no veranda on that side of the house and the window was not far from the ground. If he could steal away, he might be back before daybreak with a rescue-party, and send a messenger to the railroad to telegraph for the police. Yet he hesitated. After all, he did not know if he wanted to bring Hale and Sylvia back.

"Nothing doing!" somebody remarked in good Canadian.

Branscombe pulled down the window and gave Jordan a meaning glance.

"On the whole, I agree, sir."

Jordan nodded and picked up the cards.

"We must try to be philosophical. Millicent, will you join us at whist?"

## XXX

### THE MORNING AFTER

**D**AY had begun to break and the moon got dim, but the leader's rifle yet sparkled in faint silver light. Alan and Sylvia rode a hundred yards behind, and a quarter-mile off on either side a horseman's figure got distinct. Dew beaded the grass, the damp soil smelt, and the morning was bracingly fresh.

All was quiet. The group had pushed on fast for three or four hours, and Alan glanced at Sylvia. Her face was like a dim white mask and her head was bent. She swayed in unison with her horse's stride, but Alan thought the movement mechanical, and he wondered whether she brooded or if, after emotional stress, her brain was dull. Anyhow, she obviously did not want to talk and he was moved to pity. Sylvia ought to be sheltered and indulged, but he had entangled her in a daunting adventure.

Alan admitted he was rather daunted. When one has not slept, one's spirits sink in the cold at dawn. Romance melts, one begins to calculate, and all looks flat. Then, although the light got swiftly stronger, the landscape was bleak. The high plain was level like the sea. The soil perhaps was alkaline, or the snow had melted late, for the grass had hardly begun to spring and the grey dead stuff hid the creeping green. In the southwest a blue smear cut the horizon, and Alan understood the *mountain*

was across the frontier. On the prairie, a "mountain" is broken, wooded ground rising perhaps a hundred feet above the flats. He doubted if they would get there by sundown.

Although he was not disturbed about pursuit, he would sooner the ground rolled. On the smooth level the party could be distinguished a long way off, and if they were spotted, it implied a savage race for the frontier. Alan calculated. Rob had planned the holdup, and as a rule Rob's plans worked. The probability was, Jordan's special constables would not take the trail before sunrise, and the police would not get his telegram for six or seven hours. Then, since the troopers were not at all numerous, the officer might be forced to wait some time before he could find men. Yet one did not know, and the party soon must stop.

Alan believed his escort would see him out. Although their farms were some distance from Fairmead, and he had not met them before, they were related to the Griers and Kerrs. When James Bryce bought Fairmead, cousins of a sort, and others who had married *on* the family, had pre-empted land in the district. The Banker had perhaps helped some financially, and the Scots do not forget. Alan imagined Rob had sent for the young fellows, because Jordan would suspect him and Dalrymple, and when he arrived to investigate they must be industriously occupied.

After some time a low, wavy streak crossed the plain, and Alan knew it for the brush by a prairie creek. Half an hour afterwards he helped Sylvia down, and the group watered their horses and cooked breakfast in the ravine. The creek curved

about, and since it went to the boundary and nothing distinguished one loop from another, they did not risk much by camping on its bank. For all that, when the thin column of smoke melted Alan was happier.

After breakfast, he joined Sylvia in the trembling willows' shade. She had got back her color, and although he had thought to find her moody, she gave him a smile.

"If it will help to soothe you, you might smoke," she said. "I wonder whether young Lochinvar's look was as sober in the morning as yours was not long since."

"In the morning one begins to reflect, and when I think about all my exploit may cost you——"

"*Our* exploit," said Sylvia. "For you to make yourself accountable is rather nice; but, after all, Rob had something to do with it, and I do not think anybody ever carried off a young woman who did not, to some extent, want to go."

Alan smiled. To joke was perhaps hard, but he knew Sylvia's pluck.

"Besides, I am willing to pay," she resumed in a gentle voice. "Now I hope you are satisfied. I, of course, like you to think for me; but if you are drearily sober, I shall be annoyed. You ought to be joyous."

"That is so," Alan agreed. "My grounds to rejoice are obvious in finely modeled flesh and blood."

"Now you are very nice; but you have some other grounds. At sunset you were a prisoner, and perhaps only I and your relations refused to think you guilty."

"I rather think my relations broke my prison be-

cause they were persuaded I was guilty. They are stanch, but I'd sooner they had another reason for their stanchness."

"We will let it go," said Sylvia soberly, and then looked up with a smile. "One likes to be modest, but I suppose we ought to be married as soon as possible. In the United States, I rather think you can be married by a judge. After all, a church is not really important; and I have no wedding dress."

"My dear!" said Alan, and Sylvia allowed him to take her in his arms. Then she firmly pushed him back.

"We must try to be practical! Have you some money, Alan? I have twenty-five dollars, which are really mine. If I had not been hurried, I might have got some more."

Alan looked up, as if he were surprised, and Sylvia nodded.

"You don't yet know me. I'm not at all extravagant, and sometimes I am not remarkably scrupulous. However, my uncle is my trustee, and it entitled me to anticipate my allowance. At all events, he allows his hired men to *sub* their pay. Still, I was not sure if you'd approve. But have you some money?"

"When I started from Fairmead I had fifty cents," Alan replied, with a soft laugh.

Sylvia was thoroughbred, but she was practical. In fact, although she sometimes talked like a naive child, he knew her at least as shrewd as he.

"I believe I have now got a larger sum," he resumed. "At the Grange Rob gave me a wallet. He said I'd find some bills and letters, and Keith would fix things with the Banker. As a matter of fact, I

hadn't taken all my pay. Speed was important, and I shoved the thing into my pocket."

He got on his feet and his glance searched the plain. All he saw was a cloud's swift shadow trailing across the waste, but the troopers would soon take the trail, and for a time he must look back with persistent haunting fear. He was a fugitive, and for his sake Sylvia was something like a social outlaw. She saw him frown and clench his fist.

"You mustn't, my dear. It will not help," she said. "You mustn't think about it! Open the wallet."

"By George, we are not yet done with! I have got five hundred dollars, and the fifty cents. Then here's a letter for a gentleman in Montana, who Rob expects will *fix things* for us with the sheriff. We must hope he'll do so, but when you reflect that Rob's business in Montana was to buy cattle that probably did not belong to the sellers——"

"There is another paper," Sylvia remarked.

"Looks like complete instructions for our excursion. When Rob's pal persuades the sheriff to O.K. us, we steer for Wyoming and the Union Pacific railroad. His pal will inform us about the stage-coach lines and so forth. The notion is, we make Oregon from the south, as if we had started from California. Then we go to Walla Walla, where Jim Kerr is. Walla might be in Washington State, but anyhow, they grow Oregon wheat there, and David Kerr, Jim's uncle, has ordered his relations to find me a job. In the meantime, Rob imagines the Banker will get on a move, and if we stop on the way I must inform the Walla folk where I am."

Sylvia smiled. She knew Alan talked humorously because, like herself, he dared not be sober.

"Your people are thorough in all they do. I see them planning and calculating for us. If they'd had a map, they'd have found out exactly where Walla Walla is."

"Rob seems to have provided for another thing. When we left the Grange you might not think about clothes."

"In all circumstances, a girl thinks about her clothes," Sylvia rejoined. "What do you imagine was in my saddle-pack. Since you are a man, you perhaps thought it was food! However, I have not all I want. *Whose* clothes did Rob send for me?"

"I expect they were Kate's; Hortense's would be rather large. Frank has got the pack."

Sylvia's look got hard and a touch of color stained her skin.

"Rob is kind, but he and you are rather dull. I try to be sorry for Kate Dalrymple; but I will not use her clothes."

"Very well. If you are obstinate, we will dump the stuff in a creek. But, after all, you oughtn't to exaggerate."

"You think me ridiculous?" Sylvia rejoined. "You perhaps think me a Puritanical prig! I'm not really, and I hope I'm not revengeful; but at one time I believe Miss Dalrymple weighed your advantages. And you were attracted."

Alan looked up with embarrassed surprise. He began to think he did not altogether know Sylvia.

"My dear!" he protested.

"You are human. Miss Dalrymple has some charm, and I dare say she used all she has got.



Well, Spenser is dead, you are a fugitive, and my friends have done with me. Kate Dalrymple is accountable, and I hope she's satisfied!"

"Hugh thinks her dead," said Alan in a quiet voice.

"I do not," said Sylvia. "However, we'll let it go. I suppose I'm nasty, Alan, but I'm tired. And you thought I'd be willing to put on her clothes! Well, the sun is hot, and I might sleep."

"Then I'll talk to the boys. In all your moods you're charming."

"I wonder," said Sylvia. "Still, so long as you think me charming, I must be as charming as possible."

The sun climbed to its highest point, and the northwest wind got fresh. The thin clouds' shadows sped faster across the wilderness, but that was all Alan saw as he lay in the grass and searched the shining plain. Until they reached the frontier, he dared not sleep. A horseman's figure gets but slowly distinct against a level background, and if he were seized, Sylvia would be carried back to Oulton, branded by disgrace, and he would pay for his carelessness in Regina jail.

His impulse was to rouse his escort and ride for freedom on American soil, but he conquered panic and reflected. After all, one must know the limit of one's power and properly use one's tools. The horses were tired, and tired horses soon get exhausted in the scorching sun. In the cool of the evening the animals would make better speed.

They started in the afternoon, and when the sun was low reached broken ground. The soil was parched and alkaline, and in wide belts the grass

did not grow. Where ravines pierced the barren wilderness their banks were dark, baked mud, and when the group rode down a coulée the forbidding landscape was like a giants' brickfield. At Fairmead Alan had heard people talk about the bad lands, the old explorers' *mauvaises terres*.

At dusk they stopped for some time by a creek where the water was comparatively sweet, and fed the horses from the provender-bags. Alan wondered whether the current joined the Missouri; Frank reckoned it went to the Milk River, but nobody knew. The rivers of the Northwest are not limpid, and their color varies from chalky yellow to dull sage-green. Frank and Alan watched; Sylvia slept like a tired child on the provender-bags. When she got up she looked about dully, and then asked:

"Did you throw away Kate Dalrymple's clothes?"

Alan was surprised, but he said he did not.

"After all," said Sylvia, "one oughtn't to be extravagant, and I might want to bribe a girl at a *nester's* homestead, or perhaps a waitress at a cheap hotel. Our hotels must, of course, be cheap."

"My dear!" said Alan. "When I think about all you have given up, I am horribly ashamed."

"But you mustn't. If I grumble, you must comfort me," said Sylvia, and kissed him as he put her on her horse.

Dawn broke across a rolling wilderness, checkered by barren patches, bleached grey turf, and belts of springing green. Nobody talked; the horses went slowly, and for all the freshness of the morning, Alan's brain was dull. He saw Sylvia slackly swung about, but sometimes her pose stiffened, as if a jolt had shaken her to wakefulness. Alan was pitiful,

although, until they found sweet water, he knew they must push ahead.

When the sun was getting hot, the leader turned his horse and Alan saw a pool sparkle in a coulée.

"I suppose we must stop, Frank?" he said. "But where's the frontier?"

"On the map. If you knew where to look, you might find a survey post, but that's all. Anyhow, the *butte* is in the United States."

Two or three miles off, and obliquely behind them when they fronted south, a little hill broke the table-land. Alan's heart beat, and his slack pose got firm. Frank gave him a nod that was somehow like a salute.

"All's right, partner! You have got away with it and beaten the North-West Police!"

Sylvia pushed her horse near them and her eyes sparkled.

"We are safe. Although I'm sorry for my uncle, Rob's exploit and yours are something to boast about."

"You helped," said Alan, and added with a dreary laugh: "But we cannot talk about it, and I must be modest. My father, long since, carried out an exploit like mine, and now I'm the clan's hero because they think I killed a man."

"You mustn't," said Sylvia firmly. "It's all done with. We are in America, and we will look in front."

She touched her horse, and they followed the others downhill to the water.

## XXXI

### AT THE TRAIL'S END

**I**N the afternoon the party stopped at a small homestead on a flat, round which a dry coulée curved. With the clay bank for a background, the shiplap house was hardly distinguishable across the hollow, but blackened posts and charred boards indicated that a barn or stable had recently been burned. Shining galvanized iron was stacked near the wreck, and a tall windmill pump revolved noisily. A barbed-wire fence went up the bank and vanished at the top. In Canada fences and pumps were not yet numerous. Alan remarked that at one or two spots the fresh, sparkling wire was cut.

Frank said they could trust the *nester*. Alan understood the word implied a small, independent farmer who, as the homestead laws allowed, had ventured to plow where the great ranchers' leases had not long since run. To do so required some courage, for the cowboy was the farmer's economical enemy, and when the battle joined neither was squeamish. Where the plow advanced, ranging cattle must go back, and a fight of some sort was perhaps inevitable.

The *nester's* wife gave them supper; very salt pork, beans, and desiccated apples. She was a thin, sallow-skinned woman, and her look was tired. The *nester* was hard and brown, and rather grim. He

got his supper in about five minutes, and while Sylvia and Alan finished theirs he began to talk.

They certainly could stop for the night, and his wife would see the girl was fixed: Rob Grier had treated him pretty good. When Frank inquired if the little town for which they steered was quiet, he laughed.

"Main Street's as quiet as a meeting-house, and now the Fort Benton cavalry are loose, Sheriff Lomax reckons to keep it so; but if you were a farmer's friend a short while back, you'd have wanted to wear an iron shirt. You seen my barn? That's my pay for stopping the fellows who began to cut my fence. They reckoned to burn the house, but when she's het up M'riar can shoot, and a cavalry patrol happened to see the burning barn."

"I have an introduction to Lomax," said Alan. "What's he like?"

"To look at?" said his host with a twinkle. "Well, he doesn't wear a ca'tridge-belt, and in town he shines his shoes. You might think him a lawyer, and if you treat him right he's reasonable. On the whole, I guess Lomax is a pretty good man to hold down toughs."

Alan thought that was something; he would not have to deal with a frontier bully.

"Is there much traffic across from Canada?" Frank asked.

"The main trail runs by the *butte*, and just now I reckon the boys are going the other way. They slip across at night, and some are the sort to get up against your mounted police. Anyhow, on Saturday one of your lot came along. Jim Kerr; he said he knew Rob."

"Thursday, I expect," said Frank. "Might have been Friday morning."

"He came in the evening. When I got home with my team he was sitting on the stoop. Must have been Saturday, M'riar?"

"Sure it was," the woman agreed. "You were putting up fence-wire Friday, and you don't go plowing Sundays while I'm a Methodist."

"What M'riar says goes," the *nester* remarked with a chuckle.

"Then, Jim certainly didn't hustle," Frank remarked, as if he were puzzled.

Alan agreed. All knew when Jim had started, and he ought to have arrived before, but it was not important, and their host began to talk about something else.

In the morning Frank and the others took the trail for Canada, but Alan waited for an hour or two. Sylvia was tired, and now they were on American soil he persuaded her to rest. Their hosts refused to take payment for more than the food and forage supplied, but when Sylvia opened Rob's pack the woman's firmness melted. Kate's taste for clothes was fastidious, and Alan imagined the material was better stuff than a *nester's* wife as a rule would use. He speculated about Kate's ambitions when she made the clothes, and was rather moved; but, after all, there was no use in being sentimental, and Sylvia was resolved to be rid of the pack.

They took the trail, and he pulled down his soft hat. At the farm he had removed the bandage, and the cut that crossed his forehead ached in the sun. The small cattle town was but twenty miles off, the day was hot, and they went slowly. Now their es-

cort was gone, they felt rather forlorn, and Alan wondered uneasily whether they would be stopped by the United States officers.

Sometimes they saw long-horned ranging cattle and a distant homestead marked by a high windmill pump, but for the most part the tableland was a desolate grey and green wilderness. When the sun was low, they followed a creek to a wide, dusty hollow, across which a slow river looped. A double row of shiplap houses straggled back from the baked clay bank. The cracked soil was beaten by the feet of cattle and horses, and the large railed enclosure was obviously a stockyard. Behind the shingled roofs, Alan saw a small square wooden tower, pierced by large circular openings like the holes by which one loads hay into an English barn. The tower supposititiously sprang from a church; at a Montana cow-town, he had imagined the most prominent object was a saloon.

They rode up the wide street. Although the board sidewalks were good, the street was seamed by gullies and pitted by holes where wheels and horses' feet had churned the deep mud in spring. A few horses were tied to a rail by a hotel; two or three wagons had been left in front of a grocery. The stores were good and the small frame houses neatly built. In the calm evening the little town was peacefully serene, and the citizens Alan saw were much the sort of people he had met at Brandon and the settlements along the Canadian Pacific track. All the same, he understood a stubborn battle was not long since fought in the wheel-torn street.

Rob's friend was a merchant; his name and occupation were painted on the false front of a hardware

store. Alan put the horses in the livery yard. Lingard received him politely, and, calling his wife, presented Sylvia.

Mrs. Lingard gave them supper, and stated that as long as they were in town Sylvia must be her guest; Alan, she added, would get a room at the hotel. Alan agreed; to know Sylvia was safe was some comfort, and he approved her hosts. Lingard seemed to be a sober, respectable storekeeper; but since Rob's business in Montana was presumably to buy stolen cattle, Alan did not see how a man like that could help. To inquire might not be tactful, and he, in fact, never found out.

After supper, Lingard gave him a cigar in his office.

"You are going to marry Miss Dane?" he asked.

Alan said he hoped to do so as soon as possible. Lingard nodded.

"I expect it can be fixed. Rob hints she ran away with you, and you are up against the police."

"He ought to have stated I ran away with her."

"Looks as if she was willing," Lingard remarked with a twinkle. "So long as I vouch for you, Murdoch, the Presbyterian minister, will not make difficulties; but the first thing's to satisfy the sheriff. He'll know you are in town, and just now all strangers must get his leave to stop; in the meantime we're kind of ruled by martial law. Anyhow, I'll look him up and you can register at the hotel. You had better use your proper name. And when you meet Lomax, don't try to bluff."

Alan went off. The hotel was small, but he thought it cleaner than the hotels at Elphinstone and the railroad settlement. The saloon fronting



the street was cool, and he noted the bar-tender's white shirt and the shining glasses and stacked bottles behind the long counter. But for the swarming flies he thought the *Occidental* a model saloon. Yet the short half-door was thick, and it looked as if the upper part had recently been removed.

Ordering a long glass of Milwaukee beer, Alan lighted his pipe. Two or three small tables were occupied, but nobody bothered him. One group played cards; the other men talked and studied large newspapers. The clothes of three or four proclaimed them cowboys, but, so far as Alan could see, they did not carry pistols. Their voices and look were quiet; subdued was perhaps the word.

By and by a young fellow in cavalry uniform pushed back the half-door. The uniform was not the Royal North-West's red and yellow, but Alan's heart beat. He remarked that a cowboy swore softly and another spat.

"Mr. Hale, of Can'da?" said the young fellow, and when Alan got up signed him to the door. "You are wanted. Step along!"

They crossed the street, and Alan saw another soldier and three horses by the sidewalk. His guard hurried him into a house, pushed back a door, saluted, and vanished.

The small room was furnished like an office, and two men occupied plain bentwood chairs. One was a cavalry officer, and Alan thought him much the type he had known at the English University, although he was older than the undergraduates. The other's large soft black hat was on the table and one saw his hair was touched by white. His clothes were good, and when he looked up thought-

fully Alan agreed with the *nester's* remark that one might take Sheriff Lomax for a lawyer.

"You are Alan Hale?" he said. "You came in with a lady who is at the Lingard store. Where are you from?"

Alan reflected. The *nester* stated that Lomax was reasonable, and Lingard had warned him not to bluff. Well, he had not much talent for cheating, and his head was cut.

"From Fairmead, Assiniboia, N.W.T.," he replied. "I imagined you did not inquire about people from Canada."

"All strangers must state their business. Where are you for?"

"Wyoming and the West. All I want is to get across to the Union Pacific."

"As fast and quietly as possible? The lady who came with you is not your wife?"

The blood leaped to Alan's skin, but he gave the sheriff a level glance.

"Our object is to be married. Mr. Lingard informed me it could be arranged."

"That's so," agreed Lomax. "I don't know if the boys will like it, but with Captain Folsom's help, I'm going to reform this town."

He saw the other smile, and resumed: "Anyhow, I'm advising the military authorities. Well, I could put you both across the frontier and send the Royal North-West word where I meant to do so; or I might hold you for inquiries. Your head's cut. Looks as if you'd had trouble in Canada. Why did you quit?"

Alan pondered. Something must be risked, and Lomax was Lingard's friend. His tale might not

persuade a British magistrate, but a British magistrate went by rule and precedent. Alan hoped the American sheriff would use his imagination; besides, frontier justice was rather founded on ethics than law. Talking quietly, he narrated all he knew about the tragedy at the butte. When he stopped he somehow thought the cavalry officer sympathetic, but he could not read the other's look.

"You'll go back to the *Occidental* and stop in town until I send for you," Lomax ordered. "You can't get a horse, and if you pull out on foot, I'll know."

Alan went off. He was not altogether downhearted. When he had gone Captain Folsom gave the sheriff an inquiring glance. Lomax impatiently flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Nothing to do with us! The boy's all right. I doubt if he killed the fellow, and if he did——"

"In Montana, you'd think him justified?" the cavalry officer suggested.

"A Cannuck jury mightn't," Lomax replied. "There's another thing: the North-West troopers haven't helped me much. They stick to their dam-fool rules: you mustn't follow a man a yard across the boundary and they want instructions from Regina before they arrest an American. Very well, if they want their man, they must file extradition papers, and maybe the lawyers will get to work. It's not my business. Until this district's pacified, I've got another job."

"Exactly," said Folsom, smiling. "Then Lingard vouches for the young fellow, and he has some influence in the town. Well, when we patrolled to Willinck, I heard a queer tale about another Canadian, who had a sworn statement witnessed by a

notary. Grant is deputy sheriff, but he seems to have argued on your lines; the thing was not his business, and he doesn't know where the stranger went. I might send a trooper across for particulars."

"Let's go over to Lingard's," Lomax suggested. "The girl might tell us something, and if her tale's like the other's, why I guess we'll let them go. Just now we have got something else to think about."

In the morning Alan went to Lingard's. Sylvia was not at all disturbed by her interview with the officers; she declared Captain Folsom was charming and the sheriff was rather nice. Alan imagined she had captivated both, but the important thing was, Lomax had told Lingard to go ahead with the wedding.

On the third day they were married at the little wooden church. Sylvia had not a wedding dress, and only Lingard, his wife, and an officer of United States cavalry were guests. Yet it did not look as if she felt herself cheated; sometimes her color came and went, but her smile was happy and her voice was calm. After the wedding, in the hot parlor behind the store, Captain Folsom gave her a small folded document.

"Lomax hopes you will like his present," he remarked. "With my countersign, the paper will carry you and your husband across the State; but if you would sooner take the Canadian trail, I believe you might risk it."

Alan looked up sharply; Sylvia's eyes sparkled, and Folsom gave her a smile.

"Not long before you arrived, a Canadian was stopped by a deputy sheriff near a cow-town thirty

miles off. After some rather candid talk, he asked for a notary, and in the presence of witnesses told a romantic tale."

"Jim Kerr!" said Alan in a hoarse voice. "But please go on."

"The man was Kerr. He stated that he had sold his farm and his friends knew when he started for Montana; but except for two, they did not know he stopped and camped for some time by a lonely bluff; and he now releases the two men from their engagement not to talk. His object was to beat up a fellow who deserved all the punishment Kerr could give. You, however, know something about that."

"The punishment was deserved," said Alan. "Please go ahead."

"Kerr waylaid the other when he was riding home in the dusk. Craythorne carried a gun, and declared he had had enough and was not going to be stopped by another of the blasted Fairmead gang. You see, Kerr's tale was circumstantial and he quoted his antagonist's rather puzzling remark. But perhaps you would sooner I gave your husband the particulars, Mrs. Hale?"

"No," said Sylvia, in a quiet voice, "I knew Craythorne, and I do not want to talk about it another time."

"Very well. Kerr admitted he was willing, if forced, to shoot, but he had not reckoned on the other's shooting first. Craythorne's horse moved, and all Kerr got was five or six large shot in his leg. When Deputy Grant stopped him the shot were yet in his leg. He, however, was able to hold his rifle, and he did not miss."

"The *nester* thought him lame," Alan remarked

to Sylvia. "All is fairly plain. Craythorne met Jim after he had knocked me out. When you think about it, Jim's exonerating me might have cost him much."

"It looks as if he was a pretty good sort," Folsom agreed. "Anyhow, he arranged for his attested statement to be sent to the Canadian police at Regina on the day after he took the trail for Wyoming."

"Then, the deputy sheriff let him go?"

Folsom smiled. "In a frontier dispute Deputy Grant is a useful man, but the arguments he uses might not persuade a Canadian court. At all events, he didn't want to escort Kerr to the boundary, and just now the jail at Willinck is fully occupied. In consequence, he sent him off, and I understand his remark was: 'You shot a British seducer? For all it has to do with me, you can go back and shoot some more.'"

He got up. "Now, like Lomax, I have another, and less pleasant, job and my troopers wait. Might I wish you and your husband all good fortune, Mrs. Hale?"

Sylvia gave him her hand. "When I crossed your frontier I was horribly afraid. Now I begin to feel I am sorry I cannot stay."

Folsom went off. They heard his horse's feet, and Sylvia turned to her hosts.

"I *am* sorry. You are all kind. Captain Folsom is delightful, and the sheriff is a dear!"

"Sometimes the boys give him a harder name," Lingard remarked with a twinkle. "Folks, however, are kind to you because they must be. But, if you like us, why don't you stop?"

Sylvia turned to Alan. "Kerr's tale exculpates you, and where one is not really forced, one ought not to run away. Don't you think we ought to go back?"

Alan pondered. He saw some risk, and some embarrassment for Sylvia, but he believed she had indicated the proper line.

"Yes," he said. "Since we are going, we will start as soon as possible." He turned to Lingard. "What about Jim Kerr?"

"He's quite safe. I guess he's now in another State and nobody will worry about him. Before your people at Ottawa can claim extradition, he'll be vanished and lost. Anyhow, in the Northwestern States we'd reckon he did right."

"That's something!" said Alan. "Well, we must thank Mrs. Lingard and you and take the trail for Canada. With her permission, I'll see about our horses."

## XXXII

### SYLVIA COMES HOME

**I**N the northwest the sky was fading red; the east was misty blue, and where the camp-fire burned behind the willows the yellow flames got sharply luminous. The horses fed in the dewy grass, and Alan, on his knees, pushed fresh sticks under the frying-pan. Sylvia turned the sputtering bacon and mixed flour and yeast-powder in a tin bowl. Her skin was scorched by the sun, and the blue smoke curled about her in a flowing curve.

"Put the pork on the hot plate, but leave the grease," she said. "Now open the can of beans, and pour some water, gently, into the bowl. Yes—you did not splash me very much! I expect you did not know I could cook?"

"I don't yet know; one hopes for the best," said Alan with a laugh. "However, I'm beginning to find out you have numerous talents and qualities I did not suspect. Since you have rashly married me, I'm afraid you'll need them all."

"You ought to have suspected; if you were very nice, and really clever, you would have *known*. But hold the pan quite firm. There! Wait another second, and then toss the flapjack."

Alan threw up the thin flat cake and caught it in the pan. Sylvia tried the stuff with a fork.



"Yes—I thought it was going in the fire. On the whole, it's pretty good."

"I doubt if your lady aunt calls bacon pork, and in cultivated society one does not use *pretty good*."

"Ah," said Sylvia, "I tried to play up! Since I have joined the Fairmead frontiersmen, I must study their idiom, but I may not at first be able to sound two R's in pork, and I may never say *bottle* like a good Canadian."

Alan's smile was apologetic. In all the circumstances, he thought Sylvia's humor brave. He was but his uncle's servant, and she was banished from the only home she knew. Moreover, a girl's wedding was, for her, an important function, but Sylvia was married at a little foreign church, with three strangers for guests, and her clothes were, for the most part, the clothes in which she had crossed the dusty plains.

For a honeymoon excursion, they rode back to the frontier; he perhaps to stand his trial, and Sylvia to begin a frugal, laborious life and bear the scornful hostility of the friends she had left. She had some grounds to be daunted; but if she were daunted, he at all events did not know.

"You do play up," he said. "I mustn't state your pluck's remarkable; I'd sooner state it's typical. Anyhow, I can't picture the circumstances in which you'd let me down. However, for a few moments, you might stop juggling with the plates."

"I'm sorry," said Sylvia. "I rather like to be flattered, but the flapjacks *are* pretty good and the por-r-k will no' keep het."

Alan laughed and took his supper. If Sylvia felt as he felt, no dinner ever served at Oulton Grange

had the charm that marked their frugal meal, and when her horse, advancing softly, rubbed its head against her arm and took some sugar from her hand, he was moved by queer emotion. By and by he cleaned the plates and, when all was put straight for morning, fixed his eyes on the cold, blue North.

"But for two things, we might have stopped in America," he said. "I was publicly accused, and all who thought me guilty must admit they were wrong. In fact, I think I'll claim a trail. Then I suppose my debt to the Banker stands. I engaged to stay at Fairmead until he released me."

"One mustn't cheat," Sylvia agreed.

"After all, I didn't stay," said Alan, smiling. "Still, every engagement has perhaps a limit, and for me to be hanged for shooting Craythorne would not have helped my creditor."

"You mustn't joke. I hate to think about it. And it's done with."

"Then let's look in front. Fairmead is a good house, and if we are very frugal my pay will support us. We, however, do not use the refinements you knew at Oulton Grange, and although I expect you'll charm my folk, as you charmed the Americans, the Griers and Dalrymples are not your sort. We are frontiersmen and our manners have frankly not the calm that marks Mrs. Jordan's caste."

"Ah," said Sylvia, "they are now my folk, and if all are like Keith and Rob, they are rather a splendid lot. You don't pretend, and you are very stanch; when you're up against it, you're *stark*. There! I guess that's good Canadian and good old-fashioned Scots." She stopped and her eyes sparkled when she resumed: "Then my relations have no more use for

me. One oughtn't to be revengeful, but, at all events, I have not an aunt."

Alan was sympathetic, but he reflected humorously that Sylvia, for all her charm, was flesh and blood. She, however, was entitled to indulge some vindictive emotion.

"I once met Jim Kerr," she went on in a thoughtful voice. "I thought him a sulky young ruffian, but, from a frontiersman's point of view, I dare say his resolve to punish Spenser was logical, and he refused to allow another to pay for his exploit. He certainly waited until he thought he did not run much risk; but, of course, if a man wants to be just, he's not forced to be a fool."

"Jim's a Scot," Alan remarked.

Sylvia laughed, a soft happy laugh.

"I begin to know you. I have not yet met your uncle, but, if he is like the others, I am not much afraid."

Alan threw fresh wood on the fire. The Banker was but human, and he imagined Sylvia would carry the old fellow away. The light went, dew touched the grass and pale stars came out. Sometimes the horses stamped and pulled about their picket ropes. Then all was very quiet, and Alan and Sylvia talked in low voices by the snapping fire.

Starting two hours after sunrise, they rode north leisurely, and rings of ashes marked their camps by winding creeks and lonely bluffs. The days were hot, the nights were keen, and when Alan could find dry sticks a red fire burned in front of his open-sided shelter tent. He imagined the journey was all the honeymoon they would get, and since Sylvia was happy, he did not go fast. At length, before they

started one morning, she studied some garments she took from her pack.

"I don't know if you are much of a fairy prince, but I am like the beggar maid," she said.

"If I remember accurately, the gentleman was a king," Alan remarked.

"The Scots are accurate," Sylvia rejoined. "Well, although kind hearts are perhaps more than Toronto clothes, for about twenty minutes you might take a walk. I rather hope you will not know me when you come back."

Alan came back in forty minutes. Sylvia's dressing-room was the bank of a ravine where thin willows tossed in the wind, and although her white clothes were fresh, they had been firmly rolled in the tight saddle-pack.

"Well?" she said. "I cannot expect you to be romantic, but if you are humorous I might be vexed."

"Your charm has nothing to do with millinery," Alan rejoined. "Perhaps you know *The Ladies of St. James'*? They were, the poet states, painted to the eyes. *But Sylvia, my Sylvia, her color comes and goes.*"

"It does not," said Sylvia. "The trouble is it stops like the rose."

"Oh, well, let's try another—I think I've got it! This one's from the North:

*'In London and Dunedin are maidens fair to see.*

*But hurroo the nut-brown maiden; she's the maid for me.'*"

"Go for the horses," said Sylvia. "I believe you are sincere, but I don't know if you're very nice."

In the evening they crossed the Oulton trail, and

Alan saw Sylvia's mouth was tight. He gave her a swift sympathetic glance and then looked the other way. The sun got low, but they did not push their horses, and in the evening calm the hoofs beat a soothing rhythm. By and by Sylvia looked up.

"After our theatrical departure, to come back is flat; but you mustn't be afraid for me, and we are not going to apologize."

They crossed a gentle slope, and Fairmead cut the pale-green sky. When they were nearer, Alan saw three people in front of the house. He thought he knew Rob and Keith, but for a few moments the other puzzled him. Then his heart beat.

"The Banker is at Fairmead," he remarked.

"Send your horse along," said Sylvia. "Nobody must think we hesitate."

When they got down four people were on the veranda, and Janet Bryce gave Alan a meaning smile. She was in the background; Janet acknowledged her brother, at the top of the steps, the head of the house.

Sun and alkali dust had darkened Sylvia's skin; she was brown like a gipsy maid, and her hair, by contrast, shone like pale gold. She gave the large, stern man a level glance, and carrying herself as proudly as her light figure permitted, went up the steps.

"Sylvia, my wife!" said Alan. "My uncle, James Bryce."

"In a way, I know you," said Sylvia, and gave Bryce her hand. "You are perhaps surprised; but your receiving us is kind."

Bryce smiled. "If your husband is not obstinately independent, you are mistress at this house, and for

a day or two I'll be happy to be your guest; but we'll talk about it again."

He bent his head and kissed her; he was forced to bend. "Since I am not married, I may state I have not kissed a bonnier, stancher lass."

"Oh," said Sylvia, "I am going to love you. But not long since I told Alan we mustn't hesitate." Her calm went and her voice broke. "*Aunt Janet*——"

Janet Bryce advanced and took her in her arms, and they vanished in the house.

The Banker turned and gave Alan his hand.

"You are wiser than I at one time thought, my lad. Now I know your wife, it looks as if you had inherited your father's luck."

Alan said nothing. His uncle's nod implied that nothing was to be said. The important thing was, the old fellow had acknowledged Sylvia. As soon as Rob and he were alone, he inquired about Kate.

"Kate is at Toronto," Rob said grimly. "It seems she saw the Winnipeg newspaper, and when she thought about our searching the prairie for her, I expect she was shamed. Anyway, she got the Brandon folks to telegraph, and we got on her trail. Hugh was at Toronto—Kate will not come back. Craythorne was pledged to marry her; she'd bought her wedding clothes. Well, he's paid for 't, and ye might have hanged. Jim dare not cross the frontier, and Hugh's away back to the woods. A bonnie tangle the lass has wrought!"

In the morning Alan put on his soil-stained overalls. He had once thought them a badge of servitude; now they were his Pioneer's uniform. James Bryce rode over to Oulton, and since he was not a good horseman Jordan knew him when he was some

distance off. In fine weather they used the veranda for a sort of general room, but he took his visitor into the hall. Bryce had reckoned on the other's striking the proper note, although he noted that Mrs. Jordan was not about. He had imagined she would refuse to compromise.

"My visit is friendly," he remarked. "To begin with, you must know that your niece is now at Fairmead and was recently married to my nephew in Montana. The marriage was properly recorded, I have the documents, and I might state I approve."

Jordan gave him a keen glance. He wondered whether Bryce took his approval for granted, or implied that it was not important. Bryce's face, however, was inscrutable, and Jordan wanted to be polite.

"If you will wait for a moment or two——" he said.

A servant brought some wine and he gave Bryce a cigar. The Banker noted that his face was lined and his look somehow was tired. Well, the fellow stood for vanishing traditions and used rules that in utilitarian Canada were long since out of date. Bryce was moved to rather scornful pity, and yet he liked his host.

"In the meantime we will let the marriage go," he said. "I expect you have consulted with the Regina officers since Kerr's statement arrived. Alan Hale is now your niece's husband; but I suppose that must not be allowed to weigh."

"I am a magistrate, Mr. Bryce. Kerr's confession, however, does carry weight, particularly since it is supported by the men he names. Hale is exonerated and will not be bothered by the police. They

might apply for Kerr's extradition, but he has vanished and I much doubt if the Americans will search for him."

"Then if my nephew is frankly exculpated, I might persuade him to agree. I have, of course, consulted with the best lawyers I could engage, and some friends at Ottawa are ready to get to work. Our guns, so to speak, are loaded, but unless I help, the boy cannot fight, and in some circumstances I might refuse. What are you going to do about the raid on your house?"

Jordan smiled. He had seen where the other led.

"Although I was sent a competent police sergeant, our inquiries have not carried us far. The men who carried off my prisoner were masked; I imagine I spotted one or two, but to prove my suspicion accurate is another thing, and one cannot force a Scot to supply evidence against his friend. The police are rather justifiably annoyed; I myself am *resigned*. But if you like the wine——"

Bryce drained his glass. "My nephew declares you are a sportsman, sir! Well, we must talk about the marriage. I believe you know Alan's story?"

"When I was at Fairmead Miss Bryce told me. Might I remark that I admired her candor?"

"Janet is proud. Sometimes I think our pride carries us as far as our honesty. Well, well, I mustn't philosophize. Alan will superintend my farm, and his pay will support his wife. There will not, on my part, be a marriage settlement. In the meantime, the boy must sweat for all he gets, but he is his aunt's heir, and, to some extent, it's possible he will be mine."

"I am Sylvia's trustee," said Jordan. "On her



marriage she is entitled to about fifteen hundred pounds, and we expect she will by and by inherit a larger sum. If Miss Bryce will receive me tomorrow I will account for my stewardship. You perhaps know I was your sister's patient?"

"Sylvia is mistress at Fairmead. Janet will be happy to see you," said Bryce, and gave Jordan his hand. "My folk and yours use different rules, but at some points we meet and can agree. I hope we shall not again be antagonists."

Jordan went with him to the steps and waited while the Banker rather awkwardly got on his horse. Then for a few moments he looked straight in front. After all, he was glad Sylvia had married where she did. The Bryce lot were conquerors. In Canada their qualities were useful; his perhaps were not. He saw Fairmead advance and Oulton go back. Yet for some time he might carry on his experiment, and when he was gone the boys he trained might copy the others.

When work stopped in the evening Bryce joined the group on the veranda.

"I believe you have bought Jim Kerr's farm, Keith, and a share in Hugh's," he said. "Our crop is sown, and I dare say you are keen to take over."

"That is so," Keith agreed. "I must soon put up hay. I need a new barn, and so forth. Then to break and back-set will occupy me until the fall."

"Very well," said Bryce. "I must thank you for your good management, and you can go when you like. If I can help you start off with proper implements and teams, you have but to ask." He turned to Alan.

"You did not tell me you had married a comparatively rich wife."

Alan looked up with surprise. Sylvia smiled.

"You mustn't exaggerate. I am not rich."

"After a few weeks' notice, your trustee will, if you wish, pay you seven thousand five hundred dollars. I believe few wheat-growers in Assiniboia command as large a sum."

"Then I can buy a farm for Alan!" said Sylvia joyously.

"Not at all," Bryce rejoined. "Alan's business is to provide a home for you. If you are wise, you will allow the money to remain invested; and he will superintend my farm. His pay, of course, goes up. For example, do you think you and he could keep house for——"

He fixed a sum, and Sylvia laughed, a happy laugh.

"If we could not, I'd be horribly extravagant. You really are a dear!"

"Politeness pays," Bryce remarked. "I expect you really felt I was more generous than you thought. But your man says nothing."

"If I hesitate, it's because I don't know if I ought to take the post, sir," Alan replied.

"Keith and Rob will advise you. The crop is sown; I'll risk your gathering the harvest and a twelve-months' experiment. If at the end of another fall your superintendence does not pay, you can look for a fresh job."

"I think he'll stay," said Sylvia. "Alan's modest, but all he undertakes to do he does. And since you trust us, we must make good."

At six o'clock in the fresh morning Alan was at the stable, and when the men led out the horses Sylvia and Keith joined the group. Latour turned to Keith, who stepped back.

"You take over," he said to Alan. "As soon as Jim's house is ready, I pull out."

"To follow you is an awkward job," Alan remarked. "However, one can but try; and before we start to put up hay, you reckoned the belt along the boundary must be broken. Well, I'll drive the bulls. The teams to the northwest corner, boys. You will finish the land-packing, Bob. Help me move the plow, B'tise."

Latour and he lifted the plow to the jumper-sledge. Alan tapped the near ox and the big red animals strained at their collars. Then he felt a gentle touch and saw Sylvia by his side.

"I wanted to see you start. Good luck, my dear!" she said.

The others were in front and Alan kissed her. His job might try his powers, but it was well begun and he had noble help. He followed the plodding oxen, and for a few minutes Sylvia stopped. Men and horses moved ahead across the dewy grass; she heard their feet beat the turf, the jingle of harness was sharp and musical. Sylvia's look was thoughtful, but somehow confident.

She had done with the life and friends she knew, but she was not afraid. Her husband's folk were her folk, and in the stern Northwest they were the conquerors. Although one must strain and calculate, where one was willing one's reward was just. The black soil did not cheat. When one balanced the

good years against the bad, it gave back, with interest, all one gave to it. She thought about the Latin tag, *Labor—vincit*.

THE END













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